

■ore no imouto ga  
konnani kawaii  
wake ga nai ⑥

6

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Illustration ◆ かんざきひろ

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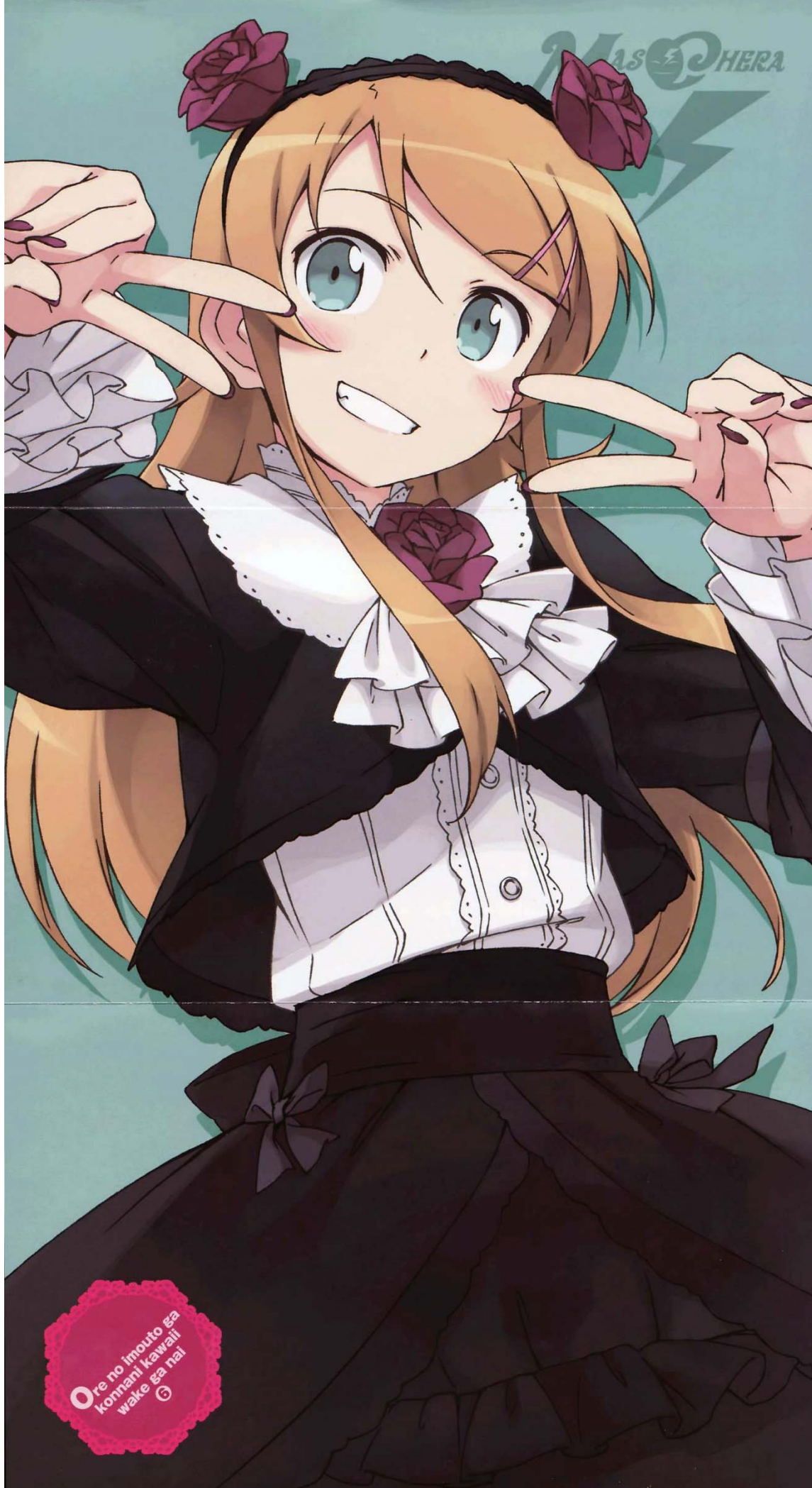
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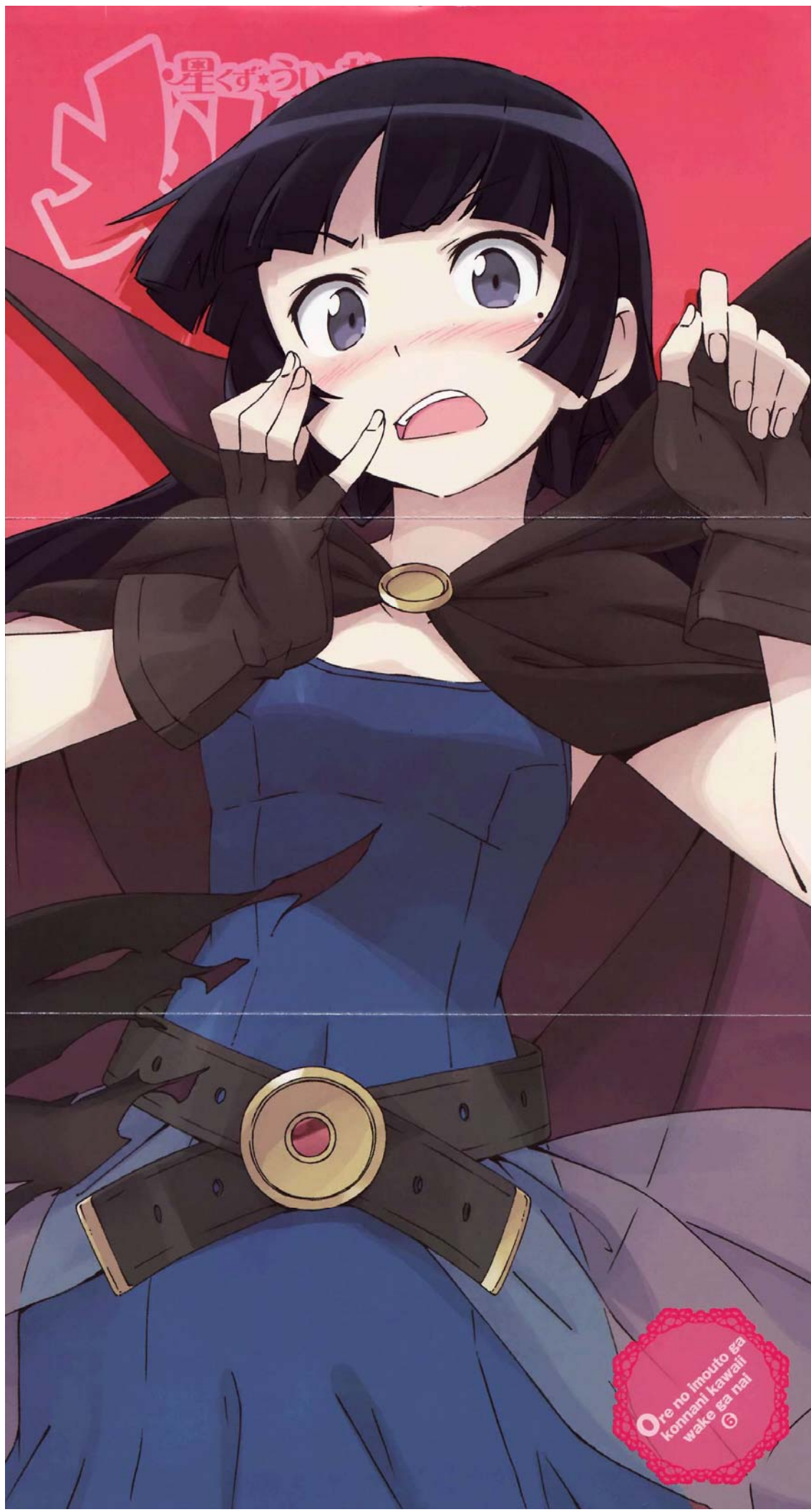






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wake ga nai  
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Ore no imouto ga  
konna ni kawaii  
wake ga nai





### Chapter 1: Part 1

My little sister's name is Kousaka Kirino. She's really pretty, gets good grades, is amazing at sports, and is a fashion magazine model... Yes, she was that kind of third year junior high school student.

For the longest time, we had a pretty poor relationship with each other... nah, that's not it. Rather, we just completely ignored each other, to the point that saying we had a "poor relationship" would be a serious understatement.

So there was a sister who was relishing in her glorious lifestyle, and a brother who was perfectly satisfied with living a normal, ordinary life.

A sister and brother who mixed just about as well as water and oil.

I kept at a distance from my sister, telling myself that she was a part of a world that I had no place in.

And in turn, my sister saw her peace-loving brother as an ambitionless loser, looking down on him.

They lived in the same house, but a heavy, thick wall was stretched out between them.

A wall so thick that the thought of trying to understand each other never even crossed their minds.

And that relationship between that brother and that sister... has changed over the last year.

Yes. An entire year has passed ever since that fateful summer day... time sure flies, doesn't it?

I don't think I need to repeat myself. I knew my little sister's secret, took part in her ridiculous life advice sessions, interfered in her affairs over and over, and generally just ran in circles like a pitiful chicken without its head.

And for the first time in many, many years, we screamed at each other, hurled abuse at each other, and managed to butt heads over our true opinions.

We had surmounted that heavy, thick wall, and we were finally able to perceive each other, directly.

Now, this is important, so I'll say it time and time again...

I really hated my little sister. And she hated me right back.

That had not changed. That had definitely not changed in the least.

However...

I think I can say this now with my head held high.

I really, really hated that girl...

But she was a dear member of my family.



### Chapter 1: Part 2

It was June. Just one day after my sister had come back to Japan.

After school on that day, when I took a peek into the living room, I saw my little sister sitting on the sofa with her legs crossed, apparently talking happily on the phone. I remembered her telling me that she would be busy today doing all the things she needed to re-enroll in school... but all that might have already been dealt with.

The scene filled me with a sense of nostalgia -- but also a sense of melancholy.

Looking at her through the corner of my eye, I spoke up. "I'm home."

At that Kirino paid me a single glance, as well as a light nod.

"... Yeah."

Considering how she just completely ignored me before, things had gotten a bit better, I think.

I went to grab something to drink. As I did so, the sound of my sister's voice reached my ears.

"Yes. That is what's happening. No, I still haven't... still haven't decided to return. Please allow me to think about it a bit longer. Yes..."

It seemed that she was talking to someone from her modeling job.

It was pretty rare to hear her speaking so respectfully. So she's not planning on going back to work?

... I wonder why.

I opened the refrigerator and took out two cans of juice. Closing the refrigerator door, I glanced at her.

Kirino ended her call, and then immediately seemed to dial for someone else.

“Hey there Ran-chin. You probably heard it from Ayase already but... I’m back. Hm? Yeah, I don’t plan to leave anymore. I’m just going to stay here and train hard until graduation, I guess? Ehehe, sorry for giving you all a shock like that.”

It sounded like she was talking with a friend from school this time. She was probably telling people that she was back.

I opened the lid to the can of juice and placed it right in front of my sister. Then I sat right across from Kirino and began reading a weekly manga magazine... don’t get me wrong, it’s not like I went out of my way to sit here just because I wanted to be around my sister, alright?

“... Mmm... alright, well let’s get together soon... yeah, in Akiba, maybe?”

From what they were talking about, I guessed that Kirino had been talking to Saori. Saori was pretty angry when Kirino had left without a word... but when I saw Kirino’s face, I gathered that they had managed to make up. Akiba... it sounded like they were planning a party or something again.

It’s been a while since the four of us had gotten together.

“... That doesn’t sound bad at all...”

My gaze was on the manga magazine, but I could feel a loose smile forming on my lips.

Around half an hour later, I managed to finish reading my manga magazine from cover to cover...

And quite unbelievably, my little sister was still on the phone.

It wasn’t as if she was still talking with the same person. She talked with one person for a bit, hung up the phone, and then called someone else... that kind of thing had been repeating itself over and over and over.

As you could have guessed, I was pretty astounded, and I waited for Kirino to hang up her next phone call to butt in.



“... You—exactly how many people are you planning to call?”

“Hm? Hmm, I dunno. For now, I’m calling all my friends. I could email them, but it’s been a while, so I want to hear their voices, and I want to tell them directly that I’m back, you know?”

“... I see. Well I’m sorry for interrupting you, then.”

“Yes, yes, you should be. Also, why have you been glancing at me ever since you sat down? That’s really gross, you know.”

“I-I’m not glancing at you at all. Don’t get the wrong idea... I just didn’t want to drink my juice in my room on the second floor and have to come all the way downstairs to throw it out.”

Tch, as always, I got pretty bad treatment from her. Even though I was being nice and paying attention to her too... Having been driven away, I reluctantly stood up from the sofa, annoyed.

“Hmph.”

Ah, right, if I remember correctly, this girl was pretty popular at school, wasn’t she?

I had forgotten all about that, considering her only otaku friends were Kuroneko and Saori.

Kirino probably had an absurd number of friends who I didn’t know about.

And when she was overseas, she probably wanted to talk to these friends with all her heart but wasn’t able to.

That’s how it seemed when she had met Kuroneko at the airport yesterday, at least. She was probably eager to have reunions with her other friends as well.

Those were natural feelings to have, and it should have been a pretty charming thing to see, but it didn’t make me happy at all.

Why? I had absolutely no idea...

### Chapter 1: Part 3

So that was basically how things had been going with my little sister as of late. And this fills me with embarrassment just to think about it, but just the other day, I flew all the way to some random place in America and begged my little sister to come back with me.

I was pretty sure that, considering something like that had happened, my relationship with my little sister would change, but

... Did it? Had anything really changed?

For me, I found that I was a lot more conscious of my little sister's presence now.

But it seemed that nothing had changed for her. She still treated me as badly as always.

Yeah... so our relationship, it hadn't changed at all... or maybe it did...Ah, right. Speaking of human relationships, there was another really troubling episode that had happened.

It actually involved Kuroneko, but...

### Chapter 1: Part 4

It was after school the next day. We were in the game club's clubroom.

Because of a certain obsessive-compulsive girl, what had been an absolutely chaotic clubroom in the spring was now much more tidy. I wondered exactly what alternate dimension she had found to store all those heaps of erogé and other goods... the more I thought about it, the more puzzling it became.

Even after the game contest had ended, I occasionally poked my head into the clubroom.

It was to check on Kuroneko. Even though I was the one who recommended her to join this club, I couldn't just leave her alone.

But she had already managed to make a friend of the same gender in the club, so if somebody pressed me for an answer, I'd have to admit that she didn't need me anymore. Really, I just went occasionally, took a look at whether Kuroneko was doing well, studied some random stuff on my own, and chatted a bit with the other club members.

However, when I peeked into the club room today, I did have another small goal in mind.

"Hey."

"....."

"Hey. Kuroneko-saaan~~?"

"... What do you want? You're being noisy."

Kuroneko stopped in the middle of her work and reluctantly turned to face me. I then spoke up, in atone like I was calling to a lover.

"Oh nothing~~. I just wanted to say hello."

"If you don't want anything, then don't talk to me. It's a bother."



“.....”

I had called out to Kuroneko in such a lovely way, but she responded with exasperation, of all things. And that cool glint in her eyes told me that she meant exactly what she said.

There was nary a hint of love or affection in her words and actions.

H-How strange... hadn't this girl kissed me once?

Some people might have forgotten, so please allow me to brag for a bit here; at that time, Kuroneko had been hurling abuse at me for hesitating to go see Kirino.

*“..... It's a curse. It's a curse that will kill you if you decide to slack off on the way.”*

She had said that and lightly pecked me on the cheek.

Then she gave my back a strong push, and sent me off towards my little sister.

Yes, and because of that, I was able to safely bring Kirino back to Japan, but...

*“Wait! The more I think about it... wasn't that just a roundabout way of confessing to me?!”* Those thoughts had gone through my head, sending my heart beating faster, and they still do even now.

However... why was it, that even after all that had happened, she didn't even seem the least embarrassed about it? For her to act like absolutely nothing had happened really made me feel as if it had all been a dream. She had been acting like this the day before yesterday too, but that was the day of her reunion with her beloved friend Kirino, so maybe that hadn't been the best time to think about this stuff. But even after she had had a day to cool off, she still kept on with that cold attitude of hers.

It felt like a huge letdown.

I had spent last night tossing and turning in bed, thinking *“Kyaaah!! What do I do if she likes me~~~?!?!”,* but looking back on that, I may have been acting like an idiot. Ugh, what a mess.

... If you were standing in my shoes right now, what would you do?

Wouldn't you also just stand there wracking your brains trying to figure out what exactly had happened?

"Hey, Kuroneko. Kuroneko?"

"... What do you want? I thought I told you to cut it out."

I could almost see visible waves of annoyance coming off from Kuroneko's head.

I quickly brought my mouth close to her ear, and whispered softly.

"... Umm... well... it's about what happened before... you know... behind the school..."

"....."

"Umm... well... what happened there... what was the meaning of—"

I couldn't get the rest of the sentence out. Before I got to hear how Kuroneko would respond, I heard a *bang!* as the door forcefully opened and Sena flew into the room.

"Gokou-san Gokou-san Gokou-san! I need to tell you something!"

This really noisy, bespectacled girl with huge breasts was Akagi Sena.

She was Kuroneko's classmate, and another first year in the game club.

By the way, "Gokou" was Kuroneko's real name (or rather, her human name).

And because of Sena's sudden intrusion, my question towards Kuroneko faded away without being settled.

Kuroneko sighed, and for some reason I heard a bit of relief mixed in with it.

"... And so a noisy one returns. Well, what is it this time?"

"I was looking at a doujin game message board on my cell phone a bit ago, and there was someone actually praising the game that we made!"

Was this girl still looking up reviews for her own game on 2chan?

Nice going, geez.

By the way, from when she said “someone was actually praising the game that we made!” you could probably guess exactly what the public opinion of our game “Greed’s Labyrinth” was.

“Here, take a look at this post!”

Sena was in high spirits as she showed her cell phone screen to me and Kuroneko.

“I really don’t like looking at this message board that much. I mean, all they do is badmouth us.”

“Now, now, Kousaka-senpai, don’t say that.”

“Really? Alright, which one is it... is it the newest comment...? Uwaah, there are a lot more comments now... oh, wait, it looks like they’re all coming from the same few people.”

“Yes, it seems that last night, there were people fighting on the board, and the thread got pretty long because of two people. And then...”

If I were to summarize the comments of these two people who were arguing, it would go something like this:

**Someone recommended this to me so I tried it, but it was such a shitty game  
www. The game balance was completely the worst www. It was so difficult I  
just gave up ww.<sup>1</sup>**

**Nah, that’s most likely because you just suck. The game balance was fine.**

**Defending a game on a flame thread like this ww. Looks like we’re in the divine  
presence of one of the game creators ww.**

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<sup>1</sup> www is the Japanese form of “lol,” but it’s often used in a derisive way. It’s short for “warau,” which is the Japanese verb for “to laugh.”

**We're only bashing the game scenario here in the first place. The game system was pretty well done.**

"I see, so they're arguing. But where exactly did someone praise the game?"

I lifted my gaze from the cell phone screen. Sena smiled at me, but she seemed slightly miffed.

"Take a closer look, senpai. This guy with the completely red ID<sup>2</sup> who tried to smear our game can go to hell and die, but look, there's a commenter who's defending the game! The game system was well done, he said! Ufufu, you know, I was the one who made that game system!"

We made the damn game together, so of course I knew that! It was seriously surprising how happy she was about this.

Sena sure was pretty pleased about that one comment, considering I had to read the comment quite a few times before I even recognized it for a compliment.

... Well, to be fair, I was pretty happy too.

There was so much crap said about the game we had tried so hard to make that I honestly wanted to never see another 2chan page again.

But I have to say, I can be pretty fickle with my opinions sometimes depending on the circumstances. And in this case, my next statement was completely sincere:

"That's great."

"Yes it is! Ahhh, I'm really pumped now! I'm going to do my best with the next one!!"

Sena rolled up her sleeves, brimming with energy. When you got past her rather calm outer layer, you could see how much of a kid Sena really was inside.

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<sup>2</sup> After much googling and soda pop, I determined that in 2chan, when your ID gets turned red, it means you've commented in the same thread more than 5 times.



But to be honest, I liked this side of her more. She left herself and her embarrassing sides completely exposed, and it felt like she was really opening her heart to us.

Yup. It was really cute.

By the way, Sena, if this were an eroge, we would probably go right into an H-scene after you appear another nine or so times, so be sure to keep count.<sup>3</sup>

On the other hand, Kuroneko stood there with a complicated expression, staring at the cell phone display that Sena was so eagerly showing to us. I was wondering whether she was a bit happy about this too, but just one word of praise was probably not enough for her. Or maybe she was just annoyed at the person who had been bashing the game.

I tried to find out which it was.

“... Hey, Kuroneko. You must be at least a little happy about this too, right?”

“.....”

Kuroneko didn't respond.

However... after Sena half-skipped back to her seat, Kuroneko mumbled something in a low voice that only I could hear.

“.... That thread... the truth is... I was the one who wrote that comment.”

“That's what happened?!”

No wonder she's not happy about it! She's the one who wrote it in the first place!

But... why exactly had she done something like that? Knowing this girl... it can't have been for the sake of her own pride. Considering what she had written in that comment, that idea was out of the question.

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<sup>3</sup> My guess for what he means here is that in eroge, after a major breakthrough scene for some female character, it is generally only a matter of time before you get to an H-scene.

### Chapter 1: Part 5

Dammit. Because Sena had come, I couldn't finish asking Kuroneko what I'd wanted to ask.

This time, maybe I should try when I'm sure we won't be interrupted. That's what I wanted to do, but it seemed that lately, I never found myself alone with Kuroneko anymore. There were always other people in the classroom, and because we each had Sena and Manami, we never walked home alone anymore.

Now that I thought about it, now that we didn't have the game to work on, I barely ever found myself alone with Kuroneko in my room anymore. I really should have done something...

C-Could it be that I had really wasted some rare opportunities back there...?!

Well, no, if I really wanted to be alone with her, I could just take a leaf out of her book and call her over... but unfortunately I just didn't have the courage! To be frank, I'd had to muster up all the little courage I had just to ask her that question back there!

Even for me, this was pretty pathetic. I wouldn't be able to complain if people started calling me Chicken Heart Kyouusuke-san.

I walked towards my house, thinking.

Kuroneko... I wondered what she thought of me.

I had asked her about something similar to that before... and then what did she say again?

She liked me...

*"I like you... just as much as your little sister likes you."*

.....

As I sullenly thought in silence, I took out my cell phone, looked through my address book, and picked *that girl's* phone number.

... Riinnnnngggg... Click. She picked up after just a single ring.

**"What do you want?"**

Her response was the very definition of apathetic. I have nothing to hide; I had called Kirino.

I lightly asked her a question.

"Hey, you, how much do you like me?"

**"Huh? What are you talking about?"**

"....."

**"Hey, you know.... I might have given you my number and email, but don't call me except for in emergencies, alright? You're being annoying."**

*Click. Beep... beep... beep...*

"She hung up on me! ... what the hell... so in other words, she really does hate me, right?"

That had to be right. That Kirino... she would never change... even though something like that had happened.

But, if that's the case...

Did Kuroneko also hate me? No, that can't be right. Even if it was completely my imagination that she liked me, I really didn't think that she actually hated me.

I mean, she kissed me!

... So what the hell? Did she really like me then? Or did she hate me?

Or maybe it was neither? Uwah... I've got noooo idea.....

This was annoying. My lips thinned and I stared at my phone sulking.

I really wish I hadn't called that girl. After all, lately I've just had such bad luck with cell phones... Ayase even blocked my number... *sniffle*... dammit, my nose is running... maybe it's a cold...?



### Chapter 1: Part 6

Kirino and Ayase's reunion happened right after I got back from school. Ayase came by to our house right when I came out of the bathroom. The minute Kirino opened the front door...

"Kirino~~~~~. It's been so loooooooooonnnnnnggg~~~~~."

"Ah-, wait, Ayase..."

Ayase jumped right into Kirino, buried her face in Kirino's chest, and hugged her tight.

It was almost as if two lovers who were separated for a lifetime were meeting each other again.

"But... but... *sniffle*..."

"... I'm home, Ayase."

"Yeah... welcome back, Kirino."

The spectacle in front of me was the exact same as the spectacle I had seen at the airport with Kuroneko the other day.

"I'm sorry Kirino... I really, really wanted to come sooner to see you..."

"It's fine. You were busy working, after all. It would have been nice to see you when I went to school to get my re-enrollment paperwork dealt with, but you were in class... Hey, you know... even when I was over there, I ordered all the magazines you were in and read them."

"Really?! I'm happy... h-hey, Kirino? You're going to stay here forever this time, right? You won't just leave without saying anything to anybody... you won't do that again, right?"

"Yeah... I don't know about next year, but I plan to stay here until I graduate at least."



“I see! That’s a relief...! Also, this might be a bit rude to say, but... I mean... I was really happy when Kirino came back to Japan. Really, really happy.”

“Thanks, Ayase. I’m sorry for not contacting you.”

Kirino said that and affectionately stroked Ayase’s head.

..... I-I wonder... if they plan to keep this up for much longer...

What the hell do they think they’re doing in the damn entranceway of our house?! And what’s more, they’re both girls!

I felt really embarrassed, and I couldn’t watch anymore.

I quickly went up the stairs and escaped to my room. And then...

“Hmph. Well, I’m happy for her.”

I let out a soft sigh and shut the door.

Yes, first she had a reunion with Kuroneko, then she made up with Saori, and now she had a reunion with Ayase...

And so, the fuss surrounding Kirino’s return to Japan settled down, and I finally had some time to breathe.

And everyone lived happily ever after.



### Chapter 1: Part 7

... Or so I thought, but the next big commotion came falling on my shoulders right afterwards.

“Oniisan, I need to ask you for advice.”

“Again?! ... H-Hey Ayase, exactly what are you going to make me do this time?”

I had thought my life advice sessions with my sister had ended, but now my little sister’s friend was selfishly using me however she wanted... it’s getting a bit tiresome to explain, but I was currently at the park near my house.

Just like the last time this had happened, I had gotten an email from Ayase on my phone, saying to come here and meet her.

“Hm, you seem to be in quite a sour mood... oniisan?”

Ayase stood there in her uniform giving me a slight pout.

Well, it’s not that I was in a sour mood... rather, it’s just that I knew that just like with Kirino, dealing with your requests never ended well.

“To be quite honest, I don’t really want to listen to you.”

“... If you do this for me, I’ll unblock your calls.”

“Great, leave it to me then.”

“That was fast!!”

“Well, of course. How much of a shock did you think it caused me when I found out my calls had been blocked by a junior high school girl? I was there in the middle of town crying these fat tears and blowing snot out my nose, you know?”

“... P-Please stop exaggerating.”

I’m being completely serious. That was no exaggeration at all.

Ayase looked a bit apologetic for what she had done, so of course I seized the opportunity. I crossed my arms and continued.

“Well, naturally you’ll unblock my calls, but I’ll make you take responsibility for your actions later as well.”

“I’m pretty confident that blocking oniisan’s calls was the right thing to do in that situation... but since you’re listening to me here... I guess there’s no helping it.”

Ayase meekly looked up at me (how cute), and asked her next question with upturned eyes.

“... So... taking responsibility... exactly what should I do then?”

“Marry me.”

“I’m reporting you.”

**WEEEEEOOOOOOOEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEE!!!**

God dammit, this bitch set off a personal alarm on her cell phone!

It was just a damn joke!

Hnnnnnggghhhh!!! Are you trying to make me look like a sex offender or something?!

I panicked and stuck out both my hands.

“Alright sorry please calm down!! Oniisan just got carried away a bit! So come on, just turn the alarm off! People are going to start staring! ... Also, there’s a police box right behind you!”<sup>1</sup>

“I know. That’s why I always make sure to meet here when I have to be alone with oniisan.”

“That’s so cruel!”

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<sup>1</sup> This is like small building with a few police stationed in it as a patrol sort of thing. I don’t think there’s really an English equivalent.

How little faith did she have in me?!

*Krkk.* Ayase pulled on the cord that was hanging out of her pocket one more time, and the alarm stopped.

“Well, I meant that half as a joke.”

“Say you meant it *all* as a joke!”

This is why I didn’t want to meet this girl! I knew nothing good could come out of it!

No matter how cute she was, if each and every time I got treated like a sex offender then my mind wouldn’t be able to take it anymore! Although, it’s not like none of this was my fault...

People were staring at us because of that alarm, so we decided to move somewhere else.

I calmed down, and then asked again.

“So... what’s this ‘advice’ you need?”

“Actually, it’s about Kanako...”

“Kanako? ... Ah, that stupid brat who looks exactly like Meruru? What’s the issue with her?”

“That girl is at the same agency as I am now, doing modeling work.” *<It’s less formal sounding this way.>*

“..... Seriously?”

So she was able to get hired even after she had been arrested for smoking...

“Yes. Well, before long, at the Akihabara UDX there will be a... Meruru, was it? There will be a Meruru event. And Kanako is going to be on stage.”

“Hm. So you mean... she’ll be cosplaying Meruru?”

“Yes. She’ll be cosplaying Meruru.”

“And that’s... part of her modeling job?”

Wasn’t that a bit strange?

“Of course it’s part of her modeling job.”

... And she responded with a smile and without any hesitation. It felt like Kanako was really getting led around by the nose by her agency... well, she was an idiot anyways.

Well, granted, Kanako was the spitting image of Meruru, and she was really good at tricking otaku into liking her on stage, so I had to admit that she was qualified for the job. Her agency probably also knew that, and that’s why they hired such a stupid brat.

“..... So, what do you want from me?”

I urged Ayase to continue, and she gave me a smile.

“I want to ask you to chaperone her as a manager, just like you did that time before.”

“Why are you asking me to do that? If you’re worried about it, why can’t you just stay with her yourself?”

“To be honest, I have other plans that day...”

“Even so, there are real managers at your office too, aren’t there? There must be a reason you’re coming to a newbie like me.” *<Less formal.>*

“There is.”

Ayase let out a sigh, and then once again looked directly at me. She suddenly changed the topic.

“I got that girl to quit smoking.”

“Ahh, yeah, I can see that.”



She said that pretty lightly, but her attitude probably didn't quite line up with what had really happened. As someone who had been threatened with death every single time he's met this girl, I could imagine her murdering Kanako, burying her in some mountain, and then coming here with a smile saying "I got that girl to quit smoking." It was honestly pretty scary.

Was Kanako still alive? I was worried...

"Oniisan, are you sure you're not thinking something pretty rude, right now?"

"It's just your imagination."

Girls were pretty sharp these days.

"So, you got her to quit smoking? Do you want my help burying the body?"

"No. What stupidity are you spewing now? ... I came to oniisan to ask him to check that Kanako is definitely keeping her promise and not smoking."

"Huh?"

"Well, that girl is pretty manipulative sometimes, isn't she? I mean, she'll tell you 'I'm sorry. I was definitely wrong. I will never smoke again,' but even though she doesn't smoke in front of you, she might smoke when she doesn't think anybody is watching."

"... Well, certainly I can see that happening..."

Also, Ayase-san... did you really make your friend say something like "Sorry. I was definitely wrong. I will never smoke tobacco again"? I was afraid to pry any deeper into that though.

Completely oblivious to my terror, Ayase continued.

"I know, right? So, I want to see if she really quit smoking or not. And she doesn't take oniisan seriously, so I think she won't hide anything from you."

I don't think you take me seriously either.

“So you think she would be really careless in front of me and not think twice about smoking?”

“Yes, exactly.”

“I get where you’re coming from. But to actually get there, we have to actually come up with a way for me and Kanako to meet... what’ll we do about that? Are you going to set up a party or something?”

When she heard my doubts, Ayase narrowed her eyes and frowned.

“..... Hentai, there’s no way that’s going to happen. Didn’t I already tell oniisan that I would give him a chance to break into the event by posing as a manager?”

“Ah, I see, I see. That’s why you said that before.”

I was pretty slow on the uptake, wasn’t I?

“Yes. When I questioned Kanako about her smoking habits, it seemed that she wanted to smoke the most when she’s annoyed or when she needs to concentrate. If she’s going to smoke, the optimal situation to catch her doing that would be in the waiting room before the event, I think.”

“Hmm, she doesn’t take me seriously, and so you want me to keep an eye on her there. Well... I guess I understand... but I’m not too confident... you know, with being a manager.”

When I mumbled that timidly, Ayase responded cheerfully.

“It’ll be fine. I believe in oniisan. You did great last time, after all. Just do the same thing this time.”

“Is that really okay?”

“Yes. Absolutely. Please have more confidence in yourself. I do, so you have nothing to worry about.”

“..... I see. If that’s really okay, then I’ll give it a try. I got the hang of it last time, so I’ll manage somehow.”

Why in the world was Ayase here encouraging me to pretend to be a manager, even though it wasn't my real job at all? If you were to look back at this later, wouldn't this all be pretty strange?

"Please do so."

Ayase gave me a glimmering smile. Ah, she's truly an angel.

"... Gotcha..."

I suddenly felt myself blush like a young lady.

... Ugh, I get the feeling that I'll never be a match for this girl no matter how long I live.

I let out a small sigh and continued.

"By the way, what should I do if I catch her smoking?"

When I asked her that, Ayase kept her angelic smile on her face, but the brightness died in her eyes.

"... Would you like to know?"

"N-No, it's fine."

Scary... Ayase-san was seriously scary.

Hey, Kanako, you're definitely keeping your promise to stop smoking, right? If you really were saying that just to make her happy, then you might be putting your life on the line here...

### Chapter 1: Part 8

However, quite happily, my worries appeared to have been unfounded. <Overuse of “seemed”.>

“Ugh dammiiiiiiiitt~~ I’m so pissedddddddddd... I really need a smoooooooooke~~~.”

Kanako was squatting right before my eyes, bouncing an electric cigarette up and down in her mouth.

She looked like some delinquent taken right out of a modern history textbook. Of course, she was also in a Meruru cosplay right now, so her body was quite exposed. To be quite frank, she might as well have been wearing pieces of string. However, she looked like nothing but an elementary schooler to me, so my Leviathan<sup>1</sup> didn’t even so much as twitch.

By the way, electronic cigarettes were machines that turned fluid in a cartridge into mist. The user would suck in that mist and use it as a replacement for smoking. There was no nicotine inside that fluid, so it was something people would use when they wanted to quit smoking.

“Bleh! This sucks, seriously! I can’t take this fruit flavor or whatever it is, ugh! I thought it was pretty cute so I bought one, but god, it just tastes so sugary and gross!”

Umm...

Just to make sure, let me introduce this person. She was Kurusu Kanako, and one of Kirino’s friends.

Just now, having accepted Ayase’s request, I had come to check whether or not Kanako had actually quit smoking. Hm, and seeing how things were, I had a feeling that my role in this affair had already come to a swift and clean close.

She was definitely holding up her end of the promise.

---

<sup>1</sup> A mythological sea serpent. Kyouzuke is overcompensating with metaphors, isn’t he?

Although, whether or not she could keep this up in the long term was another question...

It was the weekend. We were in the green room at the Akihabara UDX building.

The event schedule was pasted to the wall. Looking at it, I saw that the “Meruru and Alpha Live Chat” event that Kanako was participating in would happen in around half an hour.

I was standing in that room in the same suit and sunglasses getup that I had worn last time, along with Kanako in her Meruru cosplay. And there was one other person...

“Yo, Bridget. Go get me some juice.”

“E-Ehh~~... B-But I’m reading the script...”

This girl who was cowering after getting ordered around like that was Bridget Evans.

She was a pretty blonde girl. Last time at the Meruru cosplay tournament, she was fighting Kanako until the very end for first place. Today, she was cosplaying Meruru’s rival, Alpha.

It was a rather revealing outfit, easily recognizable from its signature black mantle. She was wearing a see-through miniskirt, and her inner suit was made out of a material that reminded me of school swimsuits. Her belly button was clearly visible. I would pay to see that costume on Ayase someday.

Still squatting down on the floor, Kanako glared at Bridget.

Kanako tap-tapped herself on the shoulder with Meruru’s Booster Rod as she spoke.

“Huh? What the hell did you say? ‘B-But I’m reading the script~~~’ my ass. Just get going, and hurry it up. Ah, and make it a strawberry Dororich.”<sup>2</sup>

---

<sup>2</sup> A rather creamy drink.

Kanako laughed.

“..... Kanakana-chan. I-I don’t think they sell those at the vending machines here...”

“Hmph, then just make a run to the convenience store.”

“Fueehhh... umm... but... I’m... I’m in my cosplay...”

“Just get going, you don’t have to change. Come on, run!”

*Whack!*

“Cut it out, you damn brat!”

I couldn’t take it anymore, and I smacked her on the head. And then that twin-tailed brat shot me a resentful look as she held the top of her head.

“You.... You’re just a damn newbie manager, and you actually dare to do that to an up and coming idol?!”

“Huh? Who the hell is an up and coming idol? Don’t bully a little girl like that!”

And don’t look so happy when you do it either! You must be a huge sadist!

“Huuhh? But Kanako’s shorter than she is!”

“... D-Don’t argue technicalities like that...”

My head’s starting to ache! It was unbelievable, this girl was even worse than Kirino back in the day!

“Got it, I got it. I’ll go buy you some juice. Just try to get along a bit better, alright?”



“You... why the hell are you acting so high and mighty even though you’re just a new manager? You’re talking to me like we’re equals<sup>3</sup>, and anyway, buying me juice is your job in the first place! I’m definitely going to report everything to the office after this!”

“Yeah, yeah, do what you want. Sorry I didn’t realize you wanted juice.”

I’m completely new to this, so there’s no reason to expect me to be able to do what a real manager does.

I’ll go and buy juice for her, but when it comes to making retorts against a stupid brat’s idiocy, I’m not pulling my punches.

---

<sup>3</sup> At this point, Kyouzuke has been using no honorifics and very informal forms of Japanese while he’s speaking to Kanako, thus causing her to make this comment.

### Chapter 1: Part 9

There were still around ten minutes left before Kanako took to the stage.

After I brought back some juice for both of them, I helped Bridget with reading her script a bit. After the last tournament, she seemed to have practiced her Japanese quite a lot. She was definitely able to speak pretty fluidly, but she was still pretty bad at reading.

“... Umm... this Kanji, how do you read it?”

“This is the kanji for ‘to massacre.’ Geez, there is some pretty violent vocabulary in this script...”

Well, Meruru was also an action anime, so I guess that’s not too surprising.

“... Thank you, Mr. Manager.”

“No problem. If there’s anywhere else that you need help with, don’t hesitate to ask.”

“Thanks.”

Bridget was sitting quietly next to me, and gave me a shy smile. This was a disciplined girl with good manners. It was quite clear she had a proper upbringing.

She had been living in England until just a while back, but moved to Japan fulltime and was now starting her career in entertainment. It seemed that she was now employed by the same agency that Kanako and Ayase worked for.

I didn’t know too much about it, but it really seemed that Ayase’s employers were trying to expand into the otaku market...

I took a glance in Kanako’s direction. That twin-tailed brat looked quite at home lying down on the sofa. She was chewing on her electric cigarette in quite a bad-mannered way, and her legs were spread wide open beneath her short miniskirt. Her panties were fully visible. Geez... this isn’t your own damn room, you know?

“Ugh, I’m so bored... hey, you. The lolicon over there.<sup>1</sup> Come over here and rub Kanako’s shoulders.”

“You’re seriously a brat, you know? Who the hell is a lolicon, you asshole?”

Don’t say stuff that people could easily misunderstand, dammit.

But, I mean, I came here as a manager today, so I guess I could do that much.

“Yeah, yeah, fine.”

I reluctantly moved towards the sofa. Kanako was laying face-down, and just as she had requested, I rubbed her shoulders. I didn’t do it too hard though. Her shoulders didn’t feel stiff at all.

When I did that, Kanako seemed to relax.

“Uheehhh~~~~ that feels niiiiice~~~~.”

“That’s good to hear. Should I do over here next?”

“... Ah, yes that’s nice, that’s nice~~. Just a little harder... uhehe~~~~.”

It seemed like she was pretty pleased. But to be fair, even though I had gotten a bit used to it from my own sister, having to listen to such an ill-mannered brat like this was just a little humiliating.

Being a manager was definitely somewhat harder than I thought.

“Oh, now my back’s starting to itch. Scratch my back, scratch my back!”

“Around here?”

“That’s completely off, you idiot. It’s on the inside of the bra... or more like that ribbon thing I have on my back.”

“..... I really don’t want to do that.”

---

<sup>1</sup> A lolicon is (a derogatory term for) someone with an unusual affinity towards underage characters.

This brat seriously didn't treat her managers as people, did she? When it came down to it, I'm a guy too, you know?

"Oh please do this for me, Mr. Manager ~~♥"

"... To think, a girl who had her pants completely showing a minute ago is now trying to flirt with me..."

I seriously felt exhausted. Seeing how this girl really was... you could say it was disenchanting. But I also came to feel a strong sense of pity for all the otaku who were going to go off and scream about how *moe* she was.

Was it really going to be fine for her act like this?

### Chapter 1: Part 10

The official name for this event at the Akihabara UDX Building was the “Stardust ☆ Witch Meruru Third Season Prerelease Fan Appreciation Festival.” Just like its horribly long title suggested, it was an event that was meant to promote the third season of Meruru, which would start airing in the coming month. On the schedule was a talk show featuring the seiyuu on the main stage, a live performance of the theme song, an advance screening of the opening, and various other things.

Bridget and Kanako had won quite a large following at the last cosplay tournament, so they were participating as special guests. They were going to participate in the live performance with the seiyuu, and they would also have their own talk show event.

Besides the main stage in the middle of the event hall, there were also other things, like sales booths. Quite a bit of time had already passed since the event started, but a long line still snaked out of the event hall.

Just like Comiket, these otaku were lined up here to get goods that they wouldn’t be able to get anywhere else.

“... They sure are into this...”

It was way worse than it had been at the cosplay tournament. I guess this event was one rank up from the last.

The main stage was divided into two sections: an area with designated seats and an area for people to stand and watch. One corner of the designated seats was reserved for event staff.

I was currently sitting in that corner. A badge indicating that I was part of the staff was hanging from my neck.

Quite expectedly, wearing a suit like this made me feel really hot.

The event had already begun, and a promotional video for the third season of Meruru was playing on the big screen on stage. And then the anime producer began to use her microphone to provide commentary.

“Exactly! It’s exactly as you see in the video... this time, the villain is Meruru herself!”

Ooohhh!! The event hall was suddenly abuzz with excitement.

This was also the first time I had heard of this. Meruru becoming the villain would be... well... it would be like Goku becoming the villain in Dragonball, wouldn’t it? That was pretty scary.

It would be as hopeless a situation as Fate-san’s lately.

And part of the commotion was probably because of the actual content of what this woman was saying, but the other part was probably because the producer was for some reason wearing an EX Meruru cosplay (her costume was black, so maybe it was the Dark Witch version?). So the huge Meruru fans around me were most likely getting fired up due to that, too.

It was pretty bewitching, even for someone like me with little interest in anime.

“If you remember, Meruru became the strongest Stardust Witch in the universe at the end of season two... but in this work she changes into a Dark Witch and appears as the villain! And an entirely new set of heroes step up to challenge her! Behold!”

At that announcement, the big screen behind her changed and showed the new female protagonists.

There was a kind-looking, mature girl, a blonde with a sharp look in her eyes, and a refined looking girl with long hair.

They appeared to be named Stardust Witch Aries, Stardust Witch Cancer<sup>1</sup>, and Stardust Witch Virgo.

“Aren’t the three of them cute?!”

---

<sup>1</sup> Worst. Character. Name. Ever.



“Yes, very cuuuute~~~!!” All these adults around me who were so into this children’s anime shouted their enthusiasm in harmony.

“Thank you very much! We’ve invited the seiyuu voicing these new heroes to be here with us, so we’ll leave the details about these characters until then! Now, compared to the magical battles so far, the battles in this new season are quite unconventional. Up until now, Meruru has won her battles by an overwhelming show of magical power, but this time around these new heroes are facing suuuuuuch a strong enemy! So in order to be able to fight against this super strong opponent, the new heroes have to use clever strategy and combine their strengths to win! Of course, that character who was Meruru’s rival and close friend from the previous seasons will also show up! The battle scenes are sure to be dramatic and suspenseful~~!! Please look forward to it!”

Uhyaaaaaaah!!! Meruru is the beeeeeeeest~~~!!!

These otaku were so damn noisy. To the point where I began to seriously question their sanity.

The noise was so overpowering that I turned myself away, which was when I saw all the people back there getting so riled that the fence separating the stage from the audience was pretty near breaking.

I might as well have been in a zombie movie right now.

But this time, I was here as a member of the event staff (even if I had gotten here through shady means), so I couldn’t feel annoyed at these fans, as I was last time.

Instead I felt gratitude and reliance towards these people making such a ruckus for us. I even felt a curious sense of solidarity with them. It was quite strange.

And like that, the event proceeded smoothly... and then at last Kanako and Bridget’s moment had come.

“Well then, our guests are going to come on stage now! Today, we have the pleasure of having the two champions of the ‘Stardust ☆ Witch Meruru Official Cosplay Tournament’ here with us! Kanakana-chan and Bridget-chan, please come on out~~~~~!!”

Introduced by the MC, Bridget and Kanako appeared on stage.

“Hello everyone~~~~~☆!!! I’m Stardust Witch Meruru~~..... Haha, just kidding! I’m Kanakana-chan. Hello everyone~~~~♥!”

“Uwaaah, it’s the legendary real-life Meruru!!!” “She’s so cute! Kanakana-chan is so cute!!!”

“Bridget-chan!!!!” “Gyaahh, I’ve seen Bridget-chan so many times on Nico Nico Douga already<sup>2</sup>!!!”

“T-Thank you everyone! I-I hope you’re enjoying yourselves today!”

Bridget faced the fans and waved gently. To explain that comment just now... apparently Bridget had uploaded a video of her cosplay onto a video-sharing site on the Internet.

(Though I had only heard about this a little while ago myself.)

Just a little over a year ago, her video became a popular topic on a Meruru fansite, and it even got into the top ranked videos list on Nico Nico Douga or whatever. And then Bridget began wanting to participate in a cosplay tournament in Japan.

*“I helped a looooot around the house, and I came to Japan like I’d always wanted with my papa,”* she had told me happily. She had also said that back then, she never imagined that she would actually start working in Japan.

---

<sup>2</sup> The Japanese otaku version of youtube.

*"A year ago, I really didn't think it would all end up like this."* I understood how she felt all too well. A year ago, I didn't think I would ever be able to talk to my sister like this again either.

No matter how gentle of a path you choose, life didn't always go how you wanted it to, for better or worse. It was too filled with surprises.

When I looked away, I saw a group of what looked to be foreign tourists smiling from a short distance away as they watched all this fanaticism.

The otaku culture had spread through the net and was now a bona fide worldwide phenomenon.

I was sincerely impressed.

But seriously... these two were pretty popular, weren't they? Judging from fan reaction here, the real Meruru and Alpha might as well have been on stage.

And then...

I heard a voice that I could have sworn I knew.

"Uhyaaaaaaaaah!! Kanakana-chaaaaaaaaaan!! Bridget-chaaaaaaaaaan!! Soooooooooo cute~~~!!! Uhahnnnn you two are just angels!!"

Just a second... that was definitely Kirino right now! Crap, I had completely forgotten about her!

There was no way an event like this wouldn't have grabbed her attention!

What the hell does she mean "angels"? She might be my sister, but that was seriously just off-putting.

And also, Kirino, don't tell me that you've completely lost sight of the fact that you're going all moe moe and red in the face over a friend you know in real life!

I quickly turned around to check.

And as I thought, I saw my little sister standing there, wearing a disguise comprised of sunglasses and a cap... but that wasn't all.

"... Ah." "... Oh."

Allow me to explain what just happened simply.

Kuroneko and I had made eye contact. She seemed to have figured out who I was (this damn disguise is so useless!) and her eyes widened in surprise.

"... W-Why the hell is that girl here..."

Kirino and Kuroneko were both in the front of the audience, so it wasn't like I could just go over and strike up a conversation.

But from how things looked, I gathered that Kirino and Kuorneko had come to see this event together.

And then...

"Dammit, we should have gotten one of the seats!! To think a 3D Meruru and Alpha would descend from the heavens... I really wanted to see them up close! Seriously, why did you go through all that trouble to invite me but not have the foresight to buy a damn seat?!"

"Hmph, this is more than enough. Also, remember that if I hadn't told you about this, a clueless girl like you wouldn't even have known about this event's existence. This would be a perfect time to kneel before me and worship the ground on which I walk. Also, if you saw that Meruru girl up close, wouldn't she figure out who you are?"

"Yeah, I guess that's right! Also, clueless... I was really busy overseas, so what could I do about that? Well, alright... I guess I can thank you just this once."

"Hmph, really? You don't look thankful at all."

"No no, I'm seriously thankful. As your reward, I'm here gracing you with my presence, aren't I?"

“You... how in the world is that supposed to be a reward?”

“Hm? But you’re happy, aren’t you?”

“..... Whatever you say. But next time, bring Saori and your oniisan with you. Going out alone with you is getting on my last nerve.”

“Hmph, I’ll think about it. But seriously, you’ve suddenly gotten pretty knowledgeable when it comes to Meruru, haven’t you? What happened?”

“Does it really matter?”

“Hahaaaa~. Don’t tell me that you were so lonely without me there that you watched the DVDs I gave you to cope? I can just picture you sitting there, hugging your knees and loyally watching them.

“Quiet. Please don’t act as if you know what you’re talking about. That makes absolutely no sense at all. I watched all of Meruru simply because I wanted to know what was wrong with it. There wasn’t any other motive.”

“‘There wasn’t any other motive,’ haha. You’re just so... hahaha.”

Haha.

It’s been quite a while since I’ve seen the two of them interacting like that. They really suited each other well when I saw them this way. Considering they had been apart for a couple months, and because of that time I had been with Kuroneko... I thought so all the more.

They had reunited and made up with each other... well, perhaps that was slightly weird to say here.

At any rate, I was glad.

Selfishly flying to America and bringing Kirino back to Japan was definitely worth it.

### Chapter 1: Part 11

Kanako and Bridget's performance ended without a major incident.

The "Stardust ☆ Witch Meruru Third Season Prerelease Fan Appreciation Festival" came to a close amid great applause.

In the end, Kanako and Bridget's live talk event was really popular even compared to all the rest of the program during the event. The agency that hired them would probably also consider this a great success.

And for me, this meant that the task that Ayase entrusted to me had been completed without a hitch.

Nice, nice, nice, this meant that she would unblock my calls. I couldn't stop smiling.

But then...

When I poked my head into the waiting room, I saw Kanako sitting on the sofa with her outfit half off.

"Ah, manager, come over here a bit. That brat seriously hit Kanako hard in the stomach, dammit~~~."

Now that she mentioned it, I noticed that she was squatting and holding her stomach with tears in her eyes.

"A-Are you alright? Bridget hit you in the stomach... w-when?"

"It was on stage... you remember right? Before we sang with Kurara-chan, we had that little famous scene reenactment thing. Around that time..."

"A-Ahh..."

They had reenacted famous scenes from season one and season two of Meruru while they were in costume...



Now that I thought back on it, something like that had certainly happened on stage...

-

*"... You're still getting up, Meruru? Why must you struggle so pointlessly? Your magic<sup>1</sup> is useless in the face of my sword. You have no chance of beating me."*

*"... But Al-chan is my precious friend!"*

*"!"*

*"I promised! I promised Al-chan that we would go to the amusement park together ... so... I definitely won't lose!"*

*"How amusing...!"*

-

And the two had acted out that "Meruru VS Alpha" scene on stage like that.

It was the first time Meruru had been defeated, and she vowed to save her friend who had turned evil. It was quite a famous scene (although Kuroneko had once called it incomprehensible rubbish).

"In other words, at that time, Bridget used a bit too much strength and got you right in the stomach?"

"Yes! Kanako sent her away to call a doctor but... that brat's definitely gonna hear about this later!"

Hmm... so that's why Bridget wasn't around. She seemed pretty nervous on stage, so she probably accidentally put too much strength into her attack. I'm sure she hadn't done it out of spite or anything, like by using the performance as an excuse to vent her frustration on Kanako.

---

<sup>1</sup> Magic here is actually written with the kanji for "gun," making for a bit of a pun.

I could see my little sister doing that, but it was out of the question for that blonde girl.

“Alright, here, let me take a look at your stomach...”

When she showed me the part in question, I saw that her stomach was red and swollen.

It didn’t seem too serious, but it did look quite painful.

“Not that it matters, but you... your stomach is pretty flabby, isn’t it?”

“Wha-?!”

Kanako was pretty shocked at that. She really seemed quite bothered by what I said.

Well, it’s not like I would call her chubby... but although it might sound incredibly rude, if I were to use a proper analogy... her stomach was flabby like a baby’s stomach.

“Y-You... what the hell do you think you’re doing calling a lady’s stomach fl- ow ow!”

“Hey, are you alright...?”

Evidently this was no time for her to get angry at me, considering her stomach was hurting. I had similar impressions about Kirino, but when I saw Kanako in a weak state like this, she definitely seemed somewhat cute.

“But seriously, even with that injury you still performed all the way to the end, didn’t you?”

“No crap. Kanako kept chanting in her head about how she was going to kill that damn brat later, but she acted perfectly nice and sweet for all those gross otaku out there.”

Her personality and mouth were terrible, but I should at least give her credit for her professional attitude. I wondered why this scene had seemed so familiar, but then I realized that my own little sister did the same thing all the time.

I see. Birds of a feather flock together.

Kanako looked up at the clock on the wall with tears still in her eyes.

“And why the hell is that stupid brat so late? How much damn time does it take her to get to the infirmary? What a damn idiot.”

“Well, let me go check on her then.”

“It’s fine. More importantly, Kanako really has to take a piss. Hm... the bathrooms are right next to the infirmary, so... ugh... help Kanako up and bring her there.”

“... A-Alright. I’ll try to get you there quick.”

This might have been an emergency situation, but I really don’t think girls should be saying that they have to “take a piss.” She was really vulgar, wasn’t she...?

So for that reason, I ended up lending Kanako a hand and heading for the temporary infirmary (she was holding it in, so she was walking pigeon-toed and bouncing up and down).

But along the way, Kanako suddenly spoke up. “Ah.”

She raised the staff that she was using to prop herself up and pointed in front.

And there I saw Bridget, along with a foreign guy. A huge, fat foreign guy. He was dressed in jeans and a white T-shirt. There was a drawing of Alpha printed on his shirt, and it obviously didn’t fit, being stretched to the point of bursting.

The guy had a vulgar-looking smile on his face, and insisted on keeping up a conversation with Bridget.

The two were chatting in rapid-fire English, so I didn’t really know what they were saying.

But my first impression was that a typical, fat, foreign otaku was saying inappropriate things to Bridget. And what's more, I saw five or six other fat foreign otaku standing around them, all laughing and jeering in English.

It was almost as if they were surrounding Bridget so she couldn't get away.

Also, this was supposed to be a staff-only place... so how had outsiders gotten in here?

"T-Those people...!"

It was clear that Kanako was nervous.

But then a shocking scene unfolded before our eyes.

The fatty who was talking with Bridget clasped his arms around her. Bridget seemed incredibly distressed about this and tried to push the fatty off, but the guy forced her face close to his... and then began to rub his cheek onto hers.

"Wha-?!"

I panicked and tried to run towards them, but someone got there before I did.

"What the hell do you think you're doing?!?!"

It was Kanako. She firmly brushed aside my hand helping her walk. She ground her teeth together, so hard I could almost hear them, and ran towards the group furiously.

"Ka... Kanakana-chan?!"

Bridget suddenly turned and looked behind her. Kanako dragged her staff along the ground, ran up to them...

And with a full swing, she slammed the staff into the side of the fatty's face. It might have been a fake staff, but it was still hard enough to be a good weapon. She also seemed to have put quite a bit of force behind the swing, because the fatty gave out a shriek and recoiled.

“Oh!”<sup>2</sup>

“Get away from Bridget, you damn fatso! You asshole... what the hell do you think you’re doing putting a hand on one of ours when Kanako wasn’t looking?!”

“You... watch where you swing that thing!”

I raised my voice as I ran to her, but Kanako gave me an icy glare.

“Shut up! You, just standing there... can you still call yourself a man?! Go call for help now!”

Dammit, she’s completely lost it...! Seeing how serious Kanako was, the other foreigners around her tightened their circle. They slowly closed in on her, as if trying to subdue her, but Kanako prevented that by swinging her staff around at them.

“Shit!”<sup>2</sup>

Feeling the danger of the situation, the foreigners didn’t try to approach any further. Kanako tore the fatty off Bridget and stood in front of her to protect her, staring down the people around.

“K-Kanakana-chan... w-why are you...”

Bridget seemed bewildered at the sudden appearance of an enraged Kanako.

Kanako turned her gaze at Bridget, and spat out her next words with lingering anger.

“Tch, are you a damn idiot? If you get into trouble with garbage like this, then scream out for help! If Kanako didn’t happen to pass by, what the hell did you plan to do?!”

“.....”

This girl...

---

<sup>2</sup> This is written in the novel using the English alphabet.

Taking a good look at her... I saw that Kanako's legs were shaking. And her eyes were moist.

She might have been an idiot, but that didn't mean she wasn't afraid when facing a larger opponent.

Just think about her personality and appearance. She might have gone through similarly scary incidents in the past. But even so, her aggressive tone didn't falter in the slightest.

"Hey, pig. Kanako will overlook this just this once, so get the hell out of here."

Kanako looked up at the giant and readied her rod with a *clink!*

She was the spitting image of a mahou shoujo<sup>3</sup> facing down a huge enemy.

"If you don't, Kanako will burn you to cinders with her Meteor Impact."

Even if the group of guys didn't understand her words, her obvious determination and air of intimidation were more than enough.

It was pretty clear to see that this giant of a man was quite overpowered by this drastically smaller, petite girl.

But right then and there...

"Kanakana-chan! You're wrong! That man is-"

Bridget, flustered, raised her voice.

"That man is my papa!"

"H-Huh?"

Kanako quickly turned to look at Bridget, and asked her next question with a stupid look on her face.

"Papa?!"

---

<sup>3</sup> Magical girl. As in Meruru.



“Y-Yes... he’s my papa.”

“P-Papa... Papa, you say... d-don’t tell me that... with your papa you...”

*Smack.*

“Ow!”

“What the hell kind of question do you think you’re about to ask this small girl?!”

I was a little late, but I still came in with the proper retort. When I heard Bridget say “papa,” I suddenly realized something. Certainly, while masquerading as a manager this time around, I had briefly heard something about that...

I really couldn’t believe it, but...

“This huge foreigner is Bridget’s father!”

“No way! They don’t look anything like each other! How the hell do you expect me to believe that Bridget could share half her genes with a gross otaku fatso like this?!”

“I thought the same thing, but that’s the truth!”

We used the fact that they couldn’t understand Japanese to our advantage and talked all we want.

Indeed...

Even though it looked like that this man was a gross otaku who was sexually harassing Bridget with a vulgar smile, he really was a caring, otaku father who was congratulating his beloved daughter after she finished her big performance. Later, I was told that the other foreigners around Bridget were all her relatives, and although they were in Japan to sightsee, they had come to cheer her on. I see... now that I thought about it, everyone did have pretty good-natured smiles on their faces...

“W-Whaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaattttttt~~~~~?!!?”

And so.

Kanako had mustered her courage and protected Bridget, had spat harsh words at Mr. Evans... all for completely the wrong reason.

Having been knocked down by Kanako, Mr. Evans held a hand to his cheek and stood up. He seemed to have gotten the gist of what had just happened, and didn't seem angry at all. In fact, if anything, he seemed apologetic.

"Haha... Sorry, Meruru."<sup>4</sup>

Having been apologized to by the same person she punched, Kanako seemed a bit at a loss.

She opted for trying to cover up her embarrassment by spitting out excuses.

"Keh! Don't confuse me like that, dammit!"

She immediately turned heel and began to walk quickly by herself towards the bathroom.

But Bridget chased after her. And after rushing up to Kanako...

Even though she was a bit taller than Kanako, Bridget flung her arms around Kanako as if she was hugging an older sister.

"Thank you, Kanakana-chan~~."

"Gyah, don't wrap your arms around me, you damn brat! Let me just make clear that Kanako wasn't shaking back there because she was afraid of your dad! Kanako just really needed to take a piss, alright?!"

"Kanakana-chan was cooler than the real Meruru back there~~♥!"

"S-Shut up and listen to what Kanako is saying, dammit! Also, you're bigger than Kanako is so get off!"

---

<sup>4</sup> This is written in katakana, but he is obviously speaking English.

I snapped a photo of that scene with my cell phone.

Because I knew this would be just a perfect gift for my little sister.

**END CHAPTER 1**





### Chapter 2: Part 1

**“Hello, is this oniisan? Yes, I read your email! It seems that Kanako did keep her promise to stay smoke-free, didn’t she? And some people at work filled me in on some other things that happened too. I heard her performance on stage was really well-received, and Bridget-chan became pretty fond of Kanako as well... yes, it was a huge success overall. I’m glad I asked oniisan to do this for me.”**

**“Well, I didn’t really do too much of anything... but hearing you say that does make me happy.”**

**“Ahah, no need to be humble. I’m really very grateful for your help. Thanks for all your hard work, oniisan.”**

**“No, no, it really wasn’t all that impressive... don’t make me blush. B-But more importantly, I did what you asked me to do, so... umm...”**

**“Yes, I understand. I’ve already unblocked your calls.”**

**“Awesome!”**

**“But don’t call me too much, okay? It’ll get annoying.”**

**“.....”**

**“Wha-?! What was that huge sound just now...?”**

**“Sorry, I was so shocked that I dropped my phone...”**

**“I-I’m not sure how to respond to that... a-anyways, oniisan. Aren’t you just a bit too clingy these days? That’s not just my overactive imagination, is it?”**

**“Well, it’s because I love you.”**

**“D-Don’t say things that are obviously false... you didn’t realize I had blocked your calls for half a year...”**

**“No, no, that’s exactly why I think we should try our best to get along from now on!”**



**"You're not being serious at all, are you? ... You know, if you try to tease me too much, I'll actually get angry. Hmph... and I had wanted to give you a reward, but now I don't know anymore..."**

"Hm? You were going to give me something other than unblocking my calls?"

**"Weren't you the one who came up with the idea? You told me to take responsibility for my actions, remember?"**

"Well, yeah, I said that... but I didn't think you would take that seriously."

**"S-See? You're not serious at all. This is why I can't have any faith in you! You liar!"**

"D-Don't get so angry! S-So? What did you want to do to thank me?"

**"It's a secret. But I think you'll definitely like it. In any case, it's a surprise present that I've put a *lot* of thought into."**

"Ahh, that sounds pretty great. I'm looking forward to it. Seriously this time."



### Chapter 2: Part 2

And well, that conversation with Ayase had been last night.

Now, it was morning. I was on the way to school. As I approached the usual T-junction, I saw Manami was already there waiting for me. She seemed to notice me, and lifted her head.

“Ah, Kyouchan.”

This bespectacled, plain-looking girl was Tamura Manami, and she was an important childhood friend of mine.

“Hey, good morning.”

“Good morning~~.”

Manami gave me a slow, gentle morning greeting. It was so slow and gentle that it made me sleepy.

I gave a nice, long yawn, and then spoke without giving much of a glance to Manami.

“Well, let’s go.”

“Yeah... u-umm... Kyouchan?”

“Hm?”

I turned around and looked at her with sleepy eyes, and saw Manami giving me a hopeful look.

“H-How is it?”

“How’s what?”

“Umm... well, that is...”



Manami suddenly blushed and looked down at the ground. She shook her head back and forth, and then seemed to steel herself before looking back up. For some reason, she seemed pretty nervous.

“Today... don’t I seem a bit different?”

“Not at all.”

“I don’t?!”

“Uwah, don’t yell out like that so suddenly. You scared me.”

Taken aback, my eyes widened, but Manami just flushed a deeper red.

I had no idea why, but she looked sort of angry.

“O-Ooooo... c-can’t you take a better look?!”

“... Even if you tell me that...”

She looked the same as always... I gave my familiar childhood friend’s body a long and hard look over.

Well, her breasts certainly have gotten bigger lately... but as I thought about that, I realized something.

“Ah. Manami, your hair...”

“Eh? What? What about my hair?”

Her voice and facial expression suddenly brightened. It looked like I had gotten it correct. Geez, what a troublesome person she was...

I tried to speak kindly.

“You have a bit of bed hair going on there.”

“I-It’s not bed hair! K-Kyouchan is an idiot!”

### Chapter 2: Part 3

Fast-forwarding; it was now break time during the same day.

I was sitting at my seat and gazing out the window when I heard Manami calling out to me.

“..... Kyouchan, what’s wrong~?”

“Hm? What do you mean?”

“It’s just that today, you really look like there’s been something on your mind... it worries me.”

She seemed to have completely forgotten about her (completely weird) outburst this morning. Manami was worried about me and came to help me out. She really was soft when it came to me. Like a grandmother doting on a grandson.

And that’s precisely why I felt relieved and entrusted myself to this girl, just like a grandson would to his grandmother.

“To be honest, there are a few things bothering me.”

I stopped thinking and spoke honestly. If I tried to lie to her here and didn’t do it well, she would get really worried. After all, if I were in her position, I would be the same way.

“Would you mind letting me know what those things are?”

“Of course I will.”

Manami gave me a relaxed smile. I could feel my own face loosening as well.

“To tell you the truth, it’s about my sister.”

I talked about one of my problems.

Manami nodded as he listened, her expression serious..

“So... you forced Kirino back here from overseas, but it feels like nothing has changed, and you don’t feel too satisfied with that... is it something like that?”

“To be frank, yeah, it’s something like that.”

“Hm... that’s sort of difficult to understand... umm...”

Hm, I guess I didn’t get my point across. Well, to put it in a way that was easier to understand... ah, got it.

Even though I should have set off some kind of flag with my little sister, why hadn’t the next event started? I guess it felt a bit like that. Granted, it’s not like I wanted to see an event like that between Kirino and me... no, even imagining it made me sick!

But something big had happened. So I had mentally prepared myself because, for better or worse, things wouldn’t be the same between us. But, even though I was incredibly conscious of Kirino now, she didn’t seem to feel the same way about me... it just felt completely anticlimactic... or maybe, you could say that my hard-earned sense of motivation was waning...

“I don’t know, there’s just something that feels off... I mean, it’s not like anything’s obviously wrong...”

“So, you wanted your relationship with Kirino-chan to improve, but that never happened, and you think that’s strange...?”

“N-No, that’s not it at all!”

“Really? But this past year, you’ve talked so much about Kirino, you know? And hearing all that... I couldn’t help but feel happy for you, you know?”

“Those were just all complaints.”

“But weren’t you lonely when Kirino went overseas?”

“That’s... well, yes, I was really lonely! Got a problem with that?!”

I hate that girl, but wouldn’t you be lonely too if one of your family members just got up and left suddenly?!”

“W-Why are you getting angry?!”

“S-Shut up.”

I bopped Manami on the head over and over. “Ow, ow, ow,” Minami went while covering her head.

“Well, I guess I’ll admit that my relationship with her has improved a bit over this past year.”

I spat that admission out.

“But that might have been ruined by now. I ended up forcing her back to Japan against her will, so it wouldn’t be strange if she had a grudge against me.”

Kirino was definitely not the kind of person who would complain to my face.

However, that didn’t change that I had held her back from achieving her dreams. There was no way she wouldn’t feel some sort of anger towards me. But I had gone to America to get my little sister back fully aware that something like that might happen.

Grumbling about all this now might seem a little odd. But... but... no matter what I tried, I could only pitifully repeat the word “but.” All this was still quite on my mind, and my grumbling even caused my childhood friend to worry.

“I was just wondering whether our relationship soured after I did that...”

When it came to my sister, I definitely hadn’t tripped any love flags.

The “little sister route” didn’t exist, so a “little sister ending” was also impossible.

“It wouldn’t be strange if we went back to the way it was a year ago, when she just ignored me. I was prepared for that much. But she’s treating me exactly the same as she treated me before she went overseas. And for some reason, that just doesn’t feel completely right to me.”

There was no way our relationship could have stayed the same after that, but from a quick look, things seemed exactly the same.

“To tell you the truth, it’s about my sister.”

And so I told her all about one of my problems.

Manami nodded as she listened, her expression serious. Then she said:

“So... you forced Kirino back here from overseas, but it feels like nothing has changed, and you don’t feel too satisfied with that... is it something like that?”

“To be frank, yeah, it’s something like that.”

“Hm... I don’t really see the problem... umm...”

...

“So, you wanted your relationship with Kirino-chan to improve, but that never happened, and you think that’s strange...?”

Didn’t you think that this was honestly pretty frightening?

“Even if Kirino-chan has a bit of a grudge against Kyouchan... I don’t think things are ruined. I think Kyouchan was prepared for the wrong thing.”

“How the hell would you know that?”

Even for me, that was a pretty terrible way to put it. I was the one who asked Manami for advice, after all.

But even then, Manami just gave me a smile, and dissolved the problems that were plaguing my mind. Just as always.

“I more than anyone else know how kind Kyouchan is, after all.”

“... How can you just stand there and say something like that so calmly...”

It was pretty clear that she was a much kinder person than I was.

When faced with something like this, in this time of trouble, I couldn’t help but feel a bit moved.

“But look who’s talking? Who was the one who rushed all the way over to America just to save his little sister from some trouble?”

“Ku...”

How long would I continue to be teased about that? My entire life? Would it seriously be for my entire life?

“Also, I was talking with Ayase-chan a while ago, and she happened to mention something. ‘Geez, all Kirino talks about this year is her brother,’ she said.”

“Ayase said something like that?”

“Yes. She was pretty angry when she said it though.”

... Ayase and Manami. What a weird pair... they did seem to have gotten pretty close lately.

But if Ayase was the source of that information, then it really might have been true; that Kirino had been talking a lot about me.

H-Hmph. Well, so what? ... No, actually, this wasn't something I could just ignore.

Manami put up a single finger and spoke with a knowing look.

“Also, if I were Kirino-chan... weeeeelll... then I'd have a reason why I wouldn't want to change the way I acted with you.”

“And what the hell is that reason?”

“It's definitely because I'd be embarrassed.”

“H-Huh?”

I was pretty bewildered, but Manami just chuckled at me.

“If I went overseas... and I had a hard time everyday, and I got depressed because things weren't going too well... but then, I saw Kyouchan going through so much effort and desperately coming to fetch me... I would be really, really happy. But I'd also be really embarrassed... and I'd try frantically to act natural in front of Kyouchan.”

“You... that's... that's just what you would do, right?”



I had asked her why Kirino should be embarrassed...

So why was it that I was feeling embarrassed myself?

Manami just smiled. "Fufu, no, that's not it at all."

"So, Kyouchan, you don't have to worry. You'll definitely be able to get along better with Kirino after this. I guarantee it."

"Hmph... it's not like I actually want to get along with my sister better..."

I abruptly turned my head in the opposite direction, but then mumbled haltingly.

"But... thanks."

"Ehehe... you're welcome."

Manami seemed embarrassed and put a hand on top of her own head. She really looked like she had a case of bed hair; she seriously should just fix it and get it over with.

"By the way, Kyouchan, you said there were other things bothering you? So there's still quite a lot to talk about, right?"

"There are, but I won't ask you for help with those."

"They're things you can't even tell me?"

"They're things that I can't tell you *precisely because* it's you."

"I see. Well, there's no point in arguing then. If there's something I can do to help, please don't hesitate to ask, alright?"

"Yeah."

### Chapter 2: Part 4

“Well, aren’t you a lucky guy.”

Once Manami had returned to her own seat, Akagi came over, and that was the first thing out of his mouth.

He was a good-looking bastard with a nice body and slightly red chestnut-colored hair.

This guy’s name was Akagi Kouhei, and he was my classmate. By the way, he also had a little sister who was a first year and who really liked homos, but he wasn’t a homo himself. I think. Probably.

“Yeah, whatever.”

“You know, I don’t know anybody but you who would answer that with ‘Yeah, whatever.’”

“What do you want with me?”

“Ah, right. Kousaka, are you free during the next holiday?”

“Well, I don’t have plans yet. I was just going to study at home.”

“I see, well then... I’d like for you to accompany me somewhere.”

“Hm...”

Now that he mentions it, lately I’ve been only hanging out with my little sister or my otaku friends, and I haven’t had too many chances to hang out with him. After all, I had just gotten back from a Meruru event... so it’d be nice to be able to hang out with a normal guy, in a place that wasn’t Akiba.

“Sure. So, where do you want to go?”

“Akihabara.”

“.....”

It seemed that I was destined to never be able to escape from the curse of the otaku world.

### Chapter 2: Part 5

And for that reason, I found myself standing outside some eroge shop in Akiba at 11 A.M. the following Sunday.

“Ahhh, but I’m really sorry about this, Kousaka! Making you come here with me like this!”

“Geez... why the hell do I even have to come to Akiba with you...?”

“Come on, don’t be like that.”

Akagi hugged a bag he had gotten from the shop to his chest and seemed to be in quite a good mood. He was pretty muscular, so his short-sleeved shirt suited him really well. And in case you were wondering, the bag he was holding contained a new homo game that his sister had asked him to buy.

We might be in Akiba, but I still had to give the guy credit for being able to brazenly buy homo games in the open like this. I quickly got away from that eroge shop and spoke to Akagi.

“To think there are shops that specialize in BL<sup>1</sup> games... ignorance is bliss.”

“Ikebukuro is actually the mecca for this type of stuff. If you go there, you can find a bigger variety of BL games and goods.”

I didn’t want to know, and yet he still told me. I faced Akagi with half-lidded eyes.

“So, you don’t need me anymore, right?”

“No, this was just on the way... I was planning on running the errand my little sister had given me by myself in the first place. The place I want you to go with me to is somewhere different.”

“Hmph.”

---

<sup>1</sup> Boy’s Love.

So that's probably why he came to Akiba to buy the homo games instead of Ikebukuro.

Akagi took the lead and we headed for the Electric City entrance of Akihabara Station.<sup>2</sup>

"So? Exactly where are we going after this?"

"I'm glad you asked!"

Akagi gave me a pointlessly chipper smile.

"Kousaka, we became third years. We became *eighteen years old*... do you get what I'm trying to say?"

"No idea. Just say it directly, you idiot."

I gave Akagi a cold look. Akagi readied himself, and then...

"Come on, don't play dumb! In short, we're officially eighteen years old, so we don't have to keep on being so careful, and we can just charge into pervy shops with our heads held high! And today is the day that we embark on that quest!"

"*That's* why you wanted me here?! Go do that by yourself!!"

I see. So this was also the reason he was acting so damn confident in that eroge shop back there.

"I get too embarrassed by myself and I can't go in!"

"That makes no sense. Your sister asks you to go to eroge shops and homo game shops by yourself!"

"That is that, this is this! Come on, Kousaka, come with me!"

"Blech, don't get any closer to me!"

I hurriedly began to walk away.

---

<sup>2</sup> [I believe it's this one.](#)

Haah... haah... i-if I try to think about this calmly, then it's certainly true that Kirino has asked me to do similar things with her pretty often... but I wonder why just the thought of a hunky guy asking me to do the same thing filled me with a sense of disgust.

"Also, I have no idea why going in together would make it any better. It's not going to change the fact that it's embarrassing."

"No, if I have someone there with me, it's definitely different! Seriously, I'm begging you. Let's just try it out once?"

"..... Pervy shops... what kind of shops are we talking about?"

Akagi smoothly accepted a flyer that was being passed out by a girl dressed as a maid, and answered my question.

"Well, the shops I want to go with you to today are the adult goods shops that Akihabara is pretty famous for. To tell you the truth, I'm pretty interested in what goes on in those adult-only spaces..."

"Don't say that so openly..."

"It's normal for a guy in high school to feel that way. You're probably pretty interested in that stuff too, right?"

Well, certainly... it's not like I *wasn't* interested. I've gone to Akiba quite a number of times already with my little sister and the others, and had even gone to buy eroge... but I was only seventeen, and most significantly I was with a group of junior high girls. So I never really had an opportunity to take a good look around the sales floor.

Hmm, I see... perhaps I could just treat this as a study of modern society...

"Hey, you closet pervert. You're smiling, you know?"

"Hmph, you're imagining things."

I was the kind of person who got really into something once I decided to do it.

Yup, yup. It's not ideal that we ended up in a place like Akiba, but in the end, it's nice to be able to hang out with a fellow male.

After all, when I was with girls, I couldn't talk about stupid things like this.

With girls, the minute I said anything that was slightly improper, I would get slammed for sexual harassment and called a gross hentai...

They just couldn't see how truly clean and pure I really was.

So let me just be frank. For me, it was more fun to hang out with Akagi and the other guys in the class than it was to hang out with Kirino and Kuroneko and the others. It was natural to feel that way at my age.

And so, I was in higher spirits than usual.

I spoke to Akagi cheerfully.

"Alright, so where should we go? Akagi, you were the one who invited me, so you definitely have an idea of where we're going already, right?"

### Chapter 2: Part 6

We had just entered the shop, but I was already exhausted. In a way, it was much more mentally fatiguing than even summer Comiket had been.

They were both pretty loaded with 18+ things, but I was way more reluctant to describe what I saw here.

We went up the stairs, and found ourselves in the men's goods department. It was a floor dedicated to selling adult goods for use by men, but I really couldn't explicitly describe any of it...

... Ugh... alright then. Maybe I'll start with the safe stuff.

1F and B1F were already pretty cramped, but 2F felt even more cramped.

Why, you ask? Because it was crowded. It was crowded to the point where some walkways seemed completely jammed, and just getting to the center of the room took a lot of effort. That's how packed it was.

Well... in short, this floor dealt in lots of popular items.

Men's goods seemed to be the specialty items of this shop.

The first floor had felt like a "cramped convenience store," and the second floor also felt that way, except every single thing lining the shelves was erotic! It was all erotic. To behold all those hundreds of types of erotic goods lined up in a row was quite a sight. It was seriously amazing..... to think that there was this much variety...

Well, I guess I can leave it at that.

But then, a certain idiot called out to me in an incredibly excited voice.

"Hey Kousaka! Look at this! It's an electric vagina!"

And everything was ruined... I was so careful to avoid all those problems, but everything was ruined...

Dammit. All you good boys and girls, even if you didn't understand what that idiot just said, please don't look it up. It's a promise, kay?

"But come on, this is seriously expensive. Seventeen thousand yen?<sup>1</sup> Ugh, I'm super interested, but I really don't think I can buy this."

And if you could, would you? But I didn't ask that.

But this was a pretty hopeless situation. I just wanted to get what we came for over with and get out of here as fast as possible.

As I talked with this bastard, our conversation slowly but surely turned to more and more vulgar topics.

I wished I could go back in time and warn the me from ten minutes ago. What the hell was I thinking when I said that it was nice to be able to hang out with a fellow male?

No, it wasn't nice *at all*!

Now that I thought about it, hanging out with Kirino and Saori and Kuroneko...

At the end of the day, girls were just much more refined. If I were with them, I definitely wouldn't be running around in this sea of depravity like this.

Well, Akagi's sister was an exception though.

Yes, when it comes to her, she's much more of a hentai than even these guys around us...

"Hey Kousaka... why do you look so zoned out?"

"It's nothing. But really... there seriously are a lot of different things here..."

I took a certain cylindrical object from the shelf.

---

<sup>1</sup> Around 170USD. Alright, this is absolutely the last footnote I'm going to write for this volume doing currency conversion.



“For example, it’s pretty hard to tell this can be used for pervy purposes from just a look...”

“Ahh, that’s the ‘TENGA’ I’ve heard about. I’m not too sure, but it has a really intricate design, and the makers have been trying hard to use fresh, handsome guys like me in posters to try to get rid of the bad image that adult goods have. And so you get this egg-shaped thing here.”

“You don’t have to explain! Are you getting paid by the makers or something?!”

And how the hell do you know so much?!

My image of this guy was seriously breaking down, breaking down as we speak!

In any case, we went around the store like that, going up one floor at a time, heading ultimately for the fifth floor.

There wasn’t much along the way that was worth special mention. Of course, there were plenty of things that I *shouldn’t* write about, but please let me just omit those from this record. If you would allow me to mention just one vulgar thing, I will say that this was probably the only place in the entire universe where you could find a “Used Panties Gashapon” machine.<sup>2</sup>

The minute we arrived at our destination floor, Akagi quickly picked out what he wanted and paid for the item.

“Would you like to apply for a point card?”

“Ah, yes please. Also, could you please gift wrap this?”

It was frightening how smooth he was being. He really didn’t seem like a first-time customer.

“Your request has been acknowledged. Sir, do you have any other questions?”

“Umm, so these points... can you exchange them for extra gifts and stuff?”

---

<sup>2</sup> A gashapon machine is [something like this](#), where you get a random prize out of the machine.

You... are you planning on coming again?! The surprises just keep coming and coming...

While Akagi talked with the shopkeeper, I found myself feeling sort of bored and I dared to take a look around the floor. A large variety of SM bondage costumes and tools were on display.

I could imagine that some of these things would really look good on Ayase or Kuroneko. There were also bondage costumes for guys, and tengu masks that I had a sneaking suspicion were supposed to be worn on the bottom half of the body.<sup>3</sup>

Akagi finally finished with his business at the register and walked back to me with a paper bag in his hand. He pointed at one corner of the shop.

"Hey, Kousaka, look over there. Looks like a dressing room."

"..... *So what?*"

"Hmm... I was thinking that maybe I should try this on just for a laugh, haha."

"Go ahead. From that moment on your nickname will be Hard Gay Akagi."

"Aren't your comebacks a bit biting lately?!"

That's probably Makabe-kun's influence.

We were always the ones making the comebacks, so I felt we probably influenced each other quite a bit.

"Well, if you're done with what you came to do, let's go back."

"Wait a sec, Kousaka. This is a pretty rare chance, so let's make sure we see everything. There's still one floor, after all."

"You certainly look like you're having fun... well, whatever. Fine."

---

<sup>3</sup> [Lol.](#)

You know what they say. In for a penny, in for a pound.

I let out a resigned sigh, and ascended the stairs to the top floor. 6F.

Let me make a confession. I'd seen quite a few adult goods on the way up here, so I had admittedly dropped my guard a bit.

Oh, but it would just be impossible to see something even crazier than the stuff we had already seen, I had foolishly thought.

But, after getting halfway up the stairs to the top floor...

"Gah.... agh...!!"

I felt a jolt run through my body.

I-Impossible...! To think that something like this... that something like this could exist in this world...!!

We both were temporarily rooted to the spot, and looked up at *that*. I'm sure that anyone who was coming across this sight for the first time had displayed a similar reaction. It was truly just something quite extraordinary.

"Kukuku... we've arrived, Kousaka... to the grand finale..."

I continued to stare; Akagi, however, made a crass-looking smirk.

"Now, Kousaka, let us throw ourselves into the height of madness! Towards the top floor...!"

"Alright!!"

Feeling the influence of my friend's passion, I found myself also getting roused up.

And then, when we arrived at the sixth floor, we found the world's most magnificent adult goods, the real deal, waiting for us.

They were the perfect union of cutting-edge skill and eroticism, a product of the ultimate Doll Maker Lirient Industry...<sup>4</sup>

-

They were love dolls. That is, they were incredibly elaborate, life-sized bishoujo<sup>5</sup> dolls.

-

“Uwoooohh...!! Wow wowwowwowwow! Look at that, Kousaka! That doll over there looks just like a naked neechan!”<sup>6</sup>

“Uwah! This is amazing! This is seriously amazing! Oh no nonono!!”

We were excited out of our wits. We plastered our faces to the show windows.

“Hey, Kousaka! They had these really lifelike dolls in the showcase out front of the store too, didn’t they?!”

“Yeah! So those were this type of thing! I see, I see!”

But unlike the dolls that were decorating the window showcase in front of the store, these ones were wearing much more X-rated outfits. They might as well have been naked. And they really were incredibly lifelike to boot.

Seeing them up close like this was more than enough. You could see a few light seams around the thigh area, but... from the look of their skin, to the molding of their faces, to their breasts... you could honestly mistake them for real women.

They were clearly on a different level than just mere mannequins. Geez, I can feel my body just heating up looking at them.

Finally managing to calm down a bit, we tried to steady our breathing, and started to talk.

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<sup>4</sup> A reference to Orient Industry.

<sup>5</sup> Bishoujo = pretty girl.

<sup>6</sup> Honorific that technically means older sister, but can also be used to refer to older women.

“Kousaka... have you ever heard of the ‘uncanny valley’ hypothesis?”

“Yeah... isn’t that the theory that once robots cross a certain threshold and look too much like human beings, they suddenly seem a lot more eerie?”

“So... what do you think about that now? I don’t feel like these are eerie at all... do you?”

“Well, I got so worked up back there that I couldn’t keep a straight head, but if you look at them calmly... I think they’re just about at the boundary of crossing into that uncanny valley... Japanese craftsmanship sure is amazing. It’s like we’re living in the future...”

Hm?

“What’s wrong, Kousaka?”

“Well... this one over here with the glasses and the big breasts... if you look closely...”

I looked Akagi right in the eyes and spoke.

“Doesn’t she look exactly like your sister?”

“I’ll kill you~~~~!!!!!!”

Akagi seized me roughly by the collar. Ugh, that hurts...! N-not good! What did I just say to this siscon aniki?!

*Bam!* Akagi thrust me away from him forcefully and began screaming at me, with the look of a demon in his eyes.

“You bastard! W-W-What are you trying to say about my little sister?!”

“Sorry, I’m sorry! B-But, the doll does look like her, doesn’t it?”

“Are you still saying that, you bastard?! T-T-T-T-There’s no way! W-What about this damn doll can possibly resemble my lovable Sena-chan.....”

.....

“No, you’re right, it looks way too much like her.”

“Exactly! It looks exactly like her! Seriously!”

Akagi pressed his face right into the show window. I could almost see steam coming out from his nose at each exhale.

“What the hell is the meaning of this?! When the hell did the people at Lirient Industries model a doll after my little sister?!”

“No, I think it’s a coincidence... just calm down!”

I understood what he felt.

If I happened to come across a doll that looked exactly like Kirino in an adult good’s shop, I really wasn’t confident that I would be able to keep my cool.

“..... *Sigh.*”

I let out a sigh. I should probably calm down as well.

I was also curious exactly how much these things cost.

I stared at a loli-style doll that was sitting on a bed. I looked at the price tag and was completely taken aback.

..... D-Damn, they were hundreds of thousands of yen...

And that doll that looked like Sena... maybe it was the breasts, but it cost a damn seven hundred thousand yen!

Ugyaah... you could buy a car with that much money...

*Sigh...* I wonder how many times I’ve sighed already. The world sure was a crazy place. I think I’ve learned a lot today.

“W-Well... I think we’ve seen everything already. Akagi... let’s start heading back.”

I spoke up to my friend, but I saw that he was frowning with a complicated expression. He had one hand on his chin and was thinking about something.

-

"..... S-Seven hundred thousand yen, huh....."

-

"Come back to Earth, Akagiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiii~!!!"

"... Ah! W-What? What's wrong, Kousaka?"

"What's wrong, nothing! Y-You were just about to go down a dangerous road there!"

"W-W-W-What do you mean?"

"Don't play dumb with me, you damn hentai! You were just about to take money out of your bike fund to buy this doll that looks exactly like your sister, weren't you?!"

"D-D-Don't be ridiculous, Kousaka-kuuuuuuun~~. That's definitely not true! Hahaha, to think I would actually do something like that!"

Akagi seemed completely shaken. He looked really sad at that moment, so I decided to give him a break.

"It's fine. But just stop it. Even if you bought it, once your real little sister finds this doll that looks exactly like her... your entire life would be over!"

For example, if that happened in my case...

-

"Y..... Y-You..... T-T-That....."

-

Crap, I just pictured what Kirino would do. But no matter how I thought about it, she would kill me. She would definitely kill me.

Akagi seemed to have imagined the same situation, but with his own little sister, and his face paled as he began to shake.

Akagi, my comrade, we brothers who have cute little sisters, sure have it tough in this world.

“.....Alright, I’ve decided, Kousaka. I really had no intention whatsoever to buy this thing here, but just to commemorate our first trip to an adult goods store, I’m going to buy the product exhibition catalogue!”

It probably goes without saying that this “product exhibition” was referring to the love doll that looked exactly like Sena. To explain, they sold specialized product catalogues, and even included things like silicone samples. This was the material they probably used to make the skin of those robot maids that sometimes showed up in eroge.

Not to mention that even though it was only a catalogue, it was still 200 yen...

“Well... just do what you want.”

What else could I say?

Akagi seemed quite happy as he put the love doll catalogue in the same bag that held the BL game that he had bought a little while earlier.



### Chapter 2: Part 7

After our field trip to the adult goods store, we went to a nearby hamburger place to eat.

“Uwaaaahhhhh~~~~~ today was really a nice day! Don’t you agree, Kousaka?!”

“Was it?”

At the very least, I knew all too well how much *you* enjoyed today.

But for me, it was just uncomfortable from start to finish.

Akagi happily stuffed his cheeks with his hamburger and chewed.

“Oh come on, Kousaka, don’t even try to pretend you didn’t enjoy it. Remember, you bought a DVD too!”

“Hm? Well, yeah, that was...”

I tried to sweep his comment under the rug. The bag with the precious DVD inside was sitting on my lap.

We had paid together for the DVD, but I was determined to keep it all for myself.

Akagi finished eating his hamburger and licked off some of the sauce from his lips.

“Fufu. I’m meeting with Sena-chan here after this, and we’re going to watch a movie together. I also managed to buy a surprise present for her!”

I really couldn’t understand why any guy would add “chan” to his little sister’s name. If I started to call Kirino “Kirino-chan,” then even I would think that was a bit gross. And Kirino would definitely call me gross as well.

But admittedly, I wouldn’t expect these words from someone like me, who had been roaming an adult goods store until just a little while ago.

“Hm, it’s pretty nice that you get along with your little sister.”

It was completely different from a certain other pair of siblings.

This guy had a little sister with a weird hobby, and always tried so hard to help her out.

I could at least relate to that part.

But Akagi tried so hard to help his little sister out, listened to her unreasonable, selfish requests... and seemed to have a lot of fun doing it.

Take today, or that time at the late night sale... he really seemed that way.

I couldn't possibly do the same. How could he go that far for his little sister?

"Hey, Akagi."

"Hm?"

"How do you honestly see your little sister?"

"As an angel."

He answered without hesitation. And what's more, he looked pretty pleased with himself.

"I see. An angel, huh?"

"Is it different for you?"

"At the very least, I wouldn't consider her an angel... but it's hard to explain exactly what she is to me. A year ago I would have answered you instantly, but I really don't know anymore."

I spoke casually.

What did I think of my little sister as...? I really didn't know.

"Hm, I see. Oh, that's right. You're having a fight with your little sister right now, right?"

"That's not really tru-... wait, were you listening when Manami and I were talking?"

“You were saying this and that about your little sister, so I couldn’t help but listen in.”

Akagi laughed. He really seemed to be in a great mood...

I started to understand something. I had always thought that Akagi’s attitude reminded me of something... but I realized that it reminded me of Kirino.

When he started talking about little sisters, he would get in high spirits and become quite talkative.

There was a difference between 2D and 3D, but both Akagi and Kirino were afflicted by that incurable disease known as “Little Sister Moe.”

Akagi energetically sucked up juice through his straw, and began to talk.

Of course, it was about his little sister. Not that I even asked.

“Hey, you know, little sisters just suddenly plop out and get born one day, right? It’s not like I wanted a little sister and asked someone to give me one. Kids are different from adults in how they can’t choose their family.”

“Yeah.”

I nodded. Akagi seemed to be reflecting on something and gave me a wry smile.

“At some point, my mom’s belly got big, and then one day she just came up to me and said ‘Kouhei is an oniichan now!’ I mean, I was just a kid, so if something like that gets said to me so suddenly, you can’t really expect me to get what’s going on. ‘Huh? What do you mean? Also, mom, aren’t you getting just a bit too fat?’ I think I said back to her. I was worried about completely the wrong thing. What about you?”

“I guess it was sorta like that for me too. Eventually Mother got admitted to a hospital... and then I got taken to her by Father, who was looking pretty worked up for a change.”

Yeah.

I remembered it quite well.

I would never forget the day that Kirino was born.

No matter how much I might hate her now.

It really was strange.

I remembered how a fierce wind had been blowing since that morning. I remembered that a heavy rain had lifted, and the clouds had all been blown away by the wind. I stood in front of the hospital looking up at the sky, and I remembered the blinding morning sun. I remembered the small rainbow that had crossed the parking lot, and the sparkling drops of water that lingered on the leaves of the blossoms in the hospital flowerbed, even though I still don't know what types of flowers those had been.

I couldn't remember a single thing about what I had done three days ago.

And yet, if I closed my eyes, I could clearly see that day from long ago as if it had been yesterday.

I also remembered the moment when I first met her.

I remembered how Kirino had been put into an incubator, how her face had looked like a monkey's as she slept.

How she had been so small. How looking at her had frightened me.

"I've known my little sister ever since she was born. It wasn't like I wanted a little sister, but I was pretty happy."

Akagi seemed to be thinking back to that time, and he chuckled.

"After we brought her home, she was always crying or wanting milk or sleeping or going number two... she was definitely a handful. I remember that just changing her diaper once was such a mess. She looked just like a monkey, so it wasn't like I thought she was cute. And as a little kid, every time my sister cried, all I could do was desperately shake her rattle in front of her and try to comfort her."

Ahh... I see.

"That's probably the same in every family."

"Yeah, I think so too. You and your sister are three years apart, right? So we're pretty alike."

And then, Akagi seemed embarrassed about something. He scratched his cheek, and his eyes wandered around the room.

"The fact that I help my little sister so much is not a matter of me liking her or hating her. I'm not going to make it out to be some grand idea of familial love either. I think... this stuff is just habit. They're the habits of an older brother with a younger sister who's not actually too much younger than he is."

"Habits?"

"Yeah."

And then, Akagi...

Akagi gently set the BL game he had just bought at the eroge shop on the table.

"Probably. Since even now, every time my little sister cries, I shake this around in front of her. Desperately."

I burst out laughing. What he said just completely made me crack up.

"You shake *that* around? Is that a rattle or something?"

"Well, it's pretty similar, right? Every time I give her this she stops crying."

"That's a crazy analogy..."

But it was also definitely a good analogy. I was clutching my stomach and couldn't stop laughing. Because what he said was right on the mark.

Yes, he was right. When the little sister cried, it was the job of the older brother to stop the tears, and if the older brother did that for a long time, that habit would become ingrained in his body.

He wouldn't be able to change that habit even years later.

For me as well, Kirino might not be an angel, but...

She was my fussy little sister whom I had known from birth.

And that was more than enough.

To me, no matter how much time passed, even if decades went by, my little sister would forever remain that tiny creature who cried in my arms. Until the day we separated, I was sure that next time as well, I would listen to her selfish requests and protect her at all costs.

And even if I hated her, I could not so easily get rid of those feelings.

My laughter finally subsided, and I wiped my tears with my sleeve.

"Oh, by the way, Akagi. I completely forgot..."

"Hm?"

"That angel of yours is standing right behind you."

"What?!"

Akagi paled and looked behind him.

And he saw his little sister Sena standing there with a smile.

"Sorry to keep you waiting, oniichan."

"S-S-Sena-chan?! How long have you been standing there?!"

Akagi almost fell out of his chair. Sena's cheeks flushed red, and...

"From when you said your little sister was an angel..."

**"Nuaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaahhhhhhhhhhhhh!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!"**

Akagi let loose a scream of pure embarrassment, and collapsed right onto the table.

“Hmm... so oniichan thinks I’m an angel?”

Sena gave Akagi a teasing smile. Compared to when I first met her in the clubroom, Sena was acting pretty childlike. Hmm, so this is what she acted like when she talked to her brother.

It was pretty cute. I suddenly started to see where Akagi was coming from.

“..... Kousakaaaa..... if you knew that Sena was right there, you should have told me!”

“Hahaha.”

But if he were in my position, he definitely wouldn’t tell me either. So I just did the same.

“Good afternoon, Kousaka-senpai.”

“Yo.”

I waved and greeted her. Sena looked back and forth between me and Akagi, and then blushed.

“..... Is this..... a date?”

“Hey, you damn fujoshi. When two guys hang out somewhere, don’t call that a date.”

“Ahah, you two sure are pretty close.”

Was this bitch listening to me?

“Hey, Akagi, back me up here and tell your little sister we’re not on a date.”

“Shut up! Just now I seriously considered whether I should kill myself...!”

“Oh, also, senpai? Where exactly did you two go?”

“Hm? We went to that adult goods store across the way and bought this adult DVD of a girl with glasses.”





“You’re the worst...”

Sena’s knowing eyes narrowed from within her glasses.

“Well, you were the one who asked. And can you really talk after you asked your brother to buy you a homo game?”

“Ah! Right!”

Far from seeming apologetic, Sena’s eyes sparkled and she picked up the bag from the eroge shop that was on the table.

“So this is the new release people have been talking about. I’ve been looking forward to this for a while!”

She really wasn’t worried about talking about her hobby in front of me anymore, did she? Well, not that there was any point in hiding it now.

Ah, right, I remembered that she had said that she would only show her true self when she was in a comfortable environment. So I guess if this meant she trusted me now, that wasn’t a bad thing at all.

Sena hugged the BL game bag lovingly to her chest, and smiled happily.

“Ehehe... Thank you, oniichan.”

“Y-Yeah. No problem.”

Akagi blushed and fawned over his little sister. He really didn’t seem like a guy who had been contemplating suicide just a minute ago.

“Ah, right, right. I have another present for you as well, so I hope you look forward to that too.”

“Really? Wow, that makes me really happy~. I wonder what it is... one of those teddy bears I’ve been wanting?”

“Hehehe... it’s a bit heavy, so I’ll give it to you when we get back home.”

He was reduced to this after getting thanked just once.

..... What a sad, sad brother this was.

“But I’m not exactly in a position to judge...”

I smiled bitterly, my feelings about this situation fairly complicated. After mumbling to myself, I stood up from my seat.

“Well, I guess I’ll head back then.”

“Ah, alright. Kousaka-senpai, I’ll see you tomorrow at school.”

“See ya later, Kousaka.”

“Yeah. You two siblings are going to a movie together now, right? Play nice with each other.”

I said goodbye to that intimate pair of siblings and began to walk towards the store exit.

But as I was doing that...

“O-Oniichan! T-There’s a weird catalogue in this bag!”

“Ah...”

“W-What is this... life-sized bishoujo doll ‘Huge-Breasted, Glasses-Wearing Yurika 100 Shiki’?<sup>1</sup> T-This is a love doll, isn’t it?! **WERE YOU PLANNING TO BUY THIS?! WAS THIS THE PRESENT YOU WERE GOING TO GIVE ME?!**”

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And suddenly, I didn’t know whether my classmate would be able to make it school tomorrow or not...

Of course, that was a question that only God could answer.

### END CHAPTER 2

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<sup>1</sup> A clear reference to Yuria 100 Shiki, a manga about a love doll.



ore no imouto ga konnani kawaii wake ga nai

### Chapter 3: Part 1

That day, we had rented out a small café in Akihabara for Kirino's homecoming party. It was to be the first time in a long time when Kirino, Kuroneko, Saori, and myself would be under the same roof.

Saori Bajeeena. She wore swirly eyeglasses and very otaku-looking clothes. She was incredibly tall, and she was a junior high school student.

She was both my and Kirino's friend, and the manager of the SNS community "Otaku Girls Unite!" She seemed to be pretty well known around all of Akiba, and so this time as well, she had chosen the place and done everything to plan this party. It was the morning of the party, and I had just received a call from Saori.

She said some urgent business had come up, and she couldn't come anymore.

**"I'm really very sorry, Kyouzuke-shi... it really doesn't seem like I will be able to get out of this one. If it's possible, please proceed without me."**

"Ah, nah, let's just try again another day then. We'll just hang out at my house today."

If she didn't come, there really wasn't a point anymore to having a party. Kirino and Kuroneko would surely agree with that.

**"I see... well then, should I finish with what I have to do, I'll also come to check on you. However, I might be quite late."**

"Nah, don't push yourself. Your plans are pretty important too, right?"

**"No, no! I'll definitely come!"**

"Uwah."

What's up with her, suddenly yelling out like that? Well, whatever.

"Really? Alright then. We'll wait for you."

**"Yes, please tell Kiririn-shi and Kuroneko-shi for me too. I'll bring gifts with me as well, so please look forward to it! Farewell!"**

"H-Hey... ugh, she hung up."

I was just about to tell her that we didn't need any gifts... that girl seriously was way too considerate of us each and every time. Of course, I was thankful for that, and she really helped us out a lot too... but how do I say it... it really would also be nice if she acted a bit more unconcerned...

She was our friend, after all.

### Chapter 3: Part 2

And so, we suspended the party and decided to gather at the Kousaka household to hang out. The last time Kirino, Kuroneko, and I had all gathered at my house was when we had that “anime appreciation event” a while back.

“Come on, get over to my place right away. It’s a good chance for me to show you my collection. Honestly, I wanted to show you last time when you came over to watch Meruru, but you showed me that strange doujinshi and we started fighting, so I didn’t get the chance, you know?”

Kirino was talking to Kuroneko on the phone. And if I recalled correctly, the huge fight that Kirino and Kuroneko got into that time was definitely both their faults.

An hour later, Kuroneko showed up at our house.

“... Good afternoon.”

“Hey. Nice to see you.”

As always, I went down to the front door to meet her.

Today, Kuroneko was not wearing the school uniform I had gotten used to seeing her in over the past few months, but rather her usual Gothic Lolita outfit.

It almost felt like we had gone back to the time before Kirino left for overseas. I was struck with a sense of nostalgia.

It’s just... Kuroneko’s school uniform was a symbol of our personal relationship with each other, free of Kirino’s influence. So seeing her in her old Gothic Lolita outfit did sadden me a little, too.

Although, considering how indifferent Kuroneko had been acting towards me lately, this really might have been the result of my own overactive imagination.

“Well, come in.”

“..... Sorry for intruding.”

Kuroneko took off her shoes and arranged them neatly on the floor before coming in. Because we had spent time together making a game, this was already all too familiar.

I took Kuroneko with me and headed for my sister's room.

*And together with Kuroneko, we headed towards my sister's room.*

When I went up to the second floor, I found Kirino there with her arms crossed, waiting for us.

"Tch, you guys are so slow."

Kirino was leaning against the wall arrogantly, but I was also sure she was really happy that her friend had come over to play. When I took a closer look, it was easy to see that she was smiling.

"Come on... come in already."

Kirino pointed her chin towards the room, prompting her.

"I know. I'm coming in."

Kuroneko responded indifferently and slipped by both me and Kirino, when...

"Huh?"

Rather than going into Kirino's room, she went into mine.

"H-Hey!"

Startled, Kirino's eyes went wide. She hurriedly stood back upright as she turned to look at me.

And her gaze was clearly and eloquently saying one thing:

*"Hey! What's the meaning of this?!"*

Well, even if you glare at me like that... As I felt the heat of Kirino's stare, I scratched my cheek and chased after Kuroneko. Kirino, following me, also came into my room.

"Hey, Kuroneko?"

"What?"

Kuroneko turned back to look at me from inside my room. I blinked in confusion.

I could feel the killing aura crackling stronger and stronger behind me.

"Umm... well... you know... *today* we're playing in Kirino's room, right?"

"Haah? Why is he putting so much stress on the word 'today'? ... What is going on?"

The mumbling I heard from behind me was all kinds of scary.

And what's more, Kuroneko began chuckling and pouring oil onto the fire.

"Oh? Was that the plan? It's just that lately I've gotten so used to coming to *this* room that I must have acted on reflex."

*Bam!* Kirino's response to Kuroneko's words was to kick me in the ass.

"Ow! What the hell?!"

"Shut up!"

Kirino removed me from blocking the entranceway with her kick, and then loudly charged into my room.

And then, she grabbed me by the collar and pushed me against the wall.

".... Ooo..."

There was a moment of silence... and then Kirino spoke, her voice sharp as daggers.



"I'll have you explain to me exactly what this means. Don't tell me you brought your little sister's friend into your room while your little sister wasn't here? If you did, I won't forgive you."

S-She's completely misunderstanding the situation...!

What the hell is up with this charged atmosphere?! She almost makes it sound like I used my position as her brother to go and rape Kuroneko or something! That's completely wrong!

Kuroneko, do something about this, dammit!

My eyes teared up and I looked at Kuroneko. However, that same Kuroneko was surveying my pitiful state and Kirino's angry expression and just chuckling happily.

She played with her black hair with a finger, and gave us a suggestive look.

"... Well, even if you ask what this means here... hmm... hey, *Kyou-chan*? How should we explain *our relationship* to *Kirino-chan*?"

"Don't make it sound like there's something going on!"

Saying *Kyou-chan* and *Kirino-chan* like that... why is it that she was so cold when we talked with each other alone, but in front of Kirino she acted almost as if we were dating?!

"..... '*Kyou-chan*,' you said..... That's gross."

I could see the veins bulging on Kirino's forehead. She really seemed pissed at what Kuroneko was doing... and I feel like I've seen her act this way before.

Yes; when my childhood friend came over to our house, she acted pretty much exactly like this.

"Oh my, but *Kirino-chan* sure seems angry. What should we do, *Kyou-chan*?"

“... You know, I just realized it, but... Kuroneko, are you trying to imitate Manami?”

“Hmph, how was it? Didn’t I sound just like her?”

“Not at all!”

Since when did Manami sound so evil?

That wasn’t Manami, but rather an impression of the character in your manga, Belphegor.

“Geez, you’re such an unpleasant person...”

“... Thank you. That makes me quite happy, *Kyou-chan*.”

“Ugh...”

Dammit, that wasn’t a compliment... don’t smile so seductively like that. My face is getting hot...

Kuroneko just smiled even more, and began her offensive.

“What’s wrong? Your face is getting red.”

“... Ooo...”

Women were really mysterious creatures. Just from her attitude, I might be inclined to think “Alright! She’s definitely interested in me!”...

But if I got carried away and tried to get close to her now, she would just start hurling cruel abuse and swiftly put everything to an end.

What in the world was I supposed to do here...? Someone please tell me...

As I writhed in mental anguish, Kirino sent me a cold glare. She spoke curtly and sharply.

“Explain. Now.”

“No Kirino... it’s not like that...”

My eyes were filled with tears as I started my explanation.

When I explained to Kirino that after she left, Saori and Kuroneko often came to my room to hang out, she seemed satisfied at first, and somehow I managed to clear up any misunderstandings about my relationship with Kuroneko. However...

“... You... don’t tell me that when I was gone... you took two junior high girls into your room to play? You’re the worst.”

This time, she got angry at me for a different reason.

Kirino balled her hands into tight fists, her voice and her shoulders shaking as she spoke.

“D-Don’t make it out to be something sketchy like that! Kuroneko and Saori both were just worried about me because they thought I’d be lonely without you! That’s it!”

“Ngg...”

“That’s why they came over to play so much. So you getting angry over it is really unreasonable. Am I wrong?”

“... That... might be true...”

I-It seemed that I had succeeded in calming her down, somehow. Or that’s what I thought, but...

“However! That might be true, but...!”

“What is it this time, dammit?”

“That! What is the meaning of *that*?!”

Kirino suddenly pointed at my bed.

And for some reason, on top of my bed was...

“..... Hmph... is your little sibling quibble not over yet? *Yawn*... it’s making me sleepy...”

Kuroneko was lying stomach-down on my bed, reading manga.

And she certainly looked quite relaxed and drowsy.

“This isn’t the time or place to be saying that!!”

Kirino suddenly launched a flying knee drop down on her friend.

It was enough of a serious attack to make Kuroneko let out a shriek as she lay there on her belly. What terrible things was Kirino doing against an opponent who was so unguarded...?

*Whoosh.* Notable to bear it anymore, Kuroneko leapt up and glared at Kirino through watery eyes.

“W-What do you think you’re doing...? You little... get off of me...”

“You get up first!”

And then a scuffle broke out right on top of my bed.

“H... How could you get on top of someone else’s bed like it’s the most natural thing in the world?”

“But it’s not your bed, is it? So why are you getting angry?”

“Wha-... t-that’s...”

“Hmph, that’s what?”

“S-Shut up! I came all the way back, so it’d be better if we just played in my room! But you people have to take every single chance to just annoy me to death!”

It was like watching two stray cats fight. Ahhh, their clothes are getting all messed up. It wasn’t even arousing anymore.

But I see, so it was like that.

*“S-Shut up! I came all the way back, so it’d be better if we just played in my room!”*

From Kirino's point of view... after she came back from overseas, she found that her brother and her friend had become rather close. She felt like the odd girl out, and that bothered her to no end.

Kuroneko probably knew that too. Because as she sat on her knees on top of my bed, and as she locked her hands with Kirino's and they pushed at each other, she had a bad-natured smirk on her face the entire time.

"... Ku ku ku... how foolish. Do you really think a lowly, powerless human like you has any chance against me in a close-quarters battle like this?"

"You say a close-quarters battle, but w-why are you using your feet to tickle my side?! That's not fair at all...! Kyah, dammit! Seriously, stop-...!"

Kirino's face was flushed an angry red, and her eyes were squinted in a (><) expression.

Trying to break the stalemate in their battle, both parties began to use their feet to kick or to tickle each other. Their skirts were going all over the place, so I suddenly found it difficult to watch without feeling like I was doing something inappropriate.

On a completely unrelated note, I never even thought to try and stop their fight. They were badmouthing each other, sure... but this was just their way of communicating.

Even within their anger, even within their abusive language, there was some happiness and affection mixed in that they could not hide.

The phrase "they were so close they fought with each other" was probably invented just to describe these two.

... Although, this really wasn't doing any favors for my bed...

### Chapter 3: Part 3

When Kirino and Kuroneko's lover's quarrel finally calmed down, we headed towards Kirino's room, exactly as we had originally planned.

We headed there so Kirino could show off the collection she had hidden in her secret compartment.

What was quite impressive was that Kirino even immediately unveiled to Kuroneko the second level of her collection (so Kuroneko now had seen just as much as I had).

That was just how much Kirino trusted Kuroneko as a friend.

"Oog... this just can't be... to think you would actually own *dark matter* like this..."

She might be difficult to understand, but Kuroneko was currently being completely taken aback while looking at the package for "Scatological \* Sisters."

"B-B-But hear me out! I just really like the guy who did the illustrations for that, and that's why I bought it..."

On the other hand, Kirino was busy giving Kuroneko the same excuse that she had given me.

"....."

As the two of them fought, I gazed at Kirino's forbidden cardboard box.

When I did that, I suddenly felt a sense of regret for not taking the chance to look at that album back at the time when Kirino went away.

At that time... I had been terrified because I had assumed that the contents of that album would be horrifyingly dark, on the level of scatology... but after time had passed, I had calmed down a bit, and Kuroneko was also here with me... so maybe I would try to take a look again.

"Hey Kirino, what's in that album over there?"

“Huh?”

Kirino seemed struck by surprise and looked at me.

“I mean, that umm... that album over there. You tried to show it to me that time before, right? And I think I said that I would take a look at it later.”

But my little sister’s response was...

“I definitely won’t show you that anymore.”

“..... I see.”

Life sure was like some eroge, but with no way to save your game.

It seemed that once I had passed a certain decision point, there was no way to go back and do it over.

### Chapter 3: Part 4

After that, Kirino's collection became the topic of discussion and we had a ball talking about it for a while... or maybe that's not a great way to put it. Rather, it was more that Kirino was rather shyly showing her collection to Kuroneko... and then Kuroneko reacted to each and every item.

"... I-I'm being shown yuri eroge so proudly by a friend of the same gender right now... how precisely should I be taking this? Perhaps I should punch you out to protect my chastity?"

"D-Don't get any weird ideas. You've got it all wrong! I just wanted to see what it felt like to be called 'oneechan' once in a while!"

"But it's clear that these heroines are not calling you 'oneechan,' but 'oneesama.'"<sup>1</sup>

"So that's why I'm saying that I made an honest mistake here too!"

"... If that's true, then sure... but I do seem to feel a tinge of unease at seeing this black-haired heroine drawn here in the middle of the game cover..."

Kuroneko's reactions mostly went something like that. She was completely taken aback.

I empathized with her. If I ever went to Akagi's room and he tried to show off some of his homo games to me, I would definitely punch him.

After that, we went down to the living room, and the three of us passed the time watching anime.

It was the continuation of the "anime appreciation event" that had been left hanging before.

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<sup>1</sup> Onesama is an honorific used for older girls that isn't necessarily restricted to people related by blood, although "oneechan" is usually used for your real sister. Onesama is in fact an honorific that is pretty common in yuri games.



The third season of Meruru had already started, and Kirino excitedly provided lots of commentary recapping the first two seasons.

And then, by the time Saori finally came, it had already become evening.

“Ahh, everyone, I really apologize for being so late.”

All of us went out into the entranceway, where we found a huge girl with swirly glasses scratching her flushed cheeks. Kuroneko spoke, seeming just a bit puzzled.

“You had other plans, didn’t you? So there’s no helping it.”

“Haha, I’m very grateful to hear you say that. Ah, yes, I brought presents. These are Meruru cookies. Please, everyone, take some and enjoy.”

Saori held out a small paper bag.

“T-Thanks... hmm, so stuff like this actually exists...”

Kirino took the cookie that was offered to her. However, even though my little sister was receiving something Meruru related, she seemed happy for only a minute before her expression clouded over.

“Also... don’t you live really far away from here?”

“Ahh, yes, I suppose.”

“Right? And you had plans too, so you really didn’t have to push yourself so hard to show up here. I mean, it’s so late that we really can’t do much anymore. That black one was going to leave soon too... ah, I mean, of course I’m happy that you came, even though we can’t hang out for more than a little bit.”

“Please don’t say that. Kiririn-shi... I...”

Saori paused for a brief second and seemed at a loss for words. But then, she looked right at Kirino and spoke.

“I wanted to see Kiririn-shi today no matter what.”

“W-Why?”

Kirino seemed a bit taken aback by Saori's serious expression.

And then, Saori spoke sadly.

"Why, you ask... hasn't it been three months? To be honest, I really wanted to see you sooner. But I've been quite busy lately... Kiririn-shi and Kuroneko-shi usually have plans but not on weekends, and Kyouusuke-shi is studying for exams too, right? If I missed out on today, I really don't know when I would get the opportunity to meet with you all again."

And that's why she pushed herself hard to get here today.

Now that she mentioned it, this was the first time Kirino and Saori were able to meet after Kirino had come back. Their schedules just didn't match, and it had been a while since they had seen each other.

"I wasn't even able to meet you at the airport... that was unacceptable. I apologize."

"T-There's nothing to be sorry about. It didn't bother me. Also, are you an idiot? I'm the one who should be apologizing!"

Kirino averted her eyes and sounded angry, but then she began to say something quite admirable.

"... I'm sorry! N-Not saying anything to you guys and going overseas like that!"

Geez, what a stubborn girl. Also, when she said "you guys," was she including me as well?

"Kiririn-shi... but you came back to us, so there's nothing to forgive."

A small smile returned to Saori's face. It seemed that she had accepted Kirino's apology.

But even so, her voice still sounded weak, with none of its usual cheerfulness.

On the other hand, Kuroneko spoke with an almost deliberate bluntness.

“Hmph, did you really think you could get off with an apology, you heartless woman? Saori has every reason to be angry, you know. After all, you’re just... you just didn’t care about us at all, am I right?”

“Huh?! That’s completely not true!”

And Kirino took the obvious bait. She really didn’t learn, did she?

“... Hmph... that’s not true? Are you sure?”

“I’m sure! Why are you doubting me?!”

“Ah, I see. So you like me then?”

“I do li-.. wha?! What are you trying to make me-“

“See, you hate me, don’t you? How unfortunate... Saori? Senpai? This girl doesn’t seem to consider us to be her friends. Isn’t that sad?”

What a nasty personality this one had. Don’t tease my sister too much. She’s too simple and innocent to take it.

But this seemed pretty interesting, so I decided to hop on too. I exchanged a glance with Saori and we both nodded.

“... I have to say, my little sister sure is cruel. As her brother, I really should apologize to you two. Kirino, after you left, these two just looked so lonely all the time.”

“Kiririn-shi... were you not lonely without us over there?”

“Y-You two too?! If you don’t cut it out, I’m seriously going to get mad!”

“Ku kuku... how fun.”

Kuroneko seemed to enjoy herself the most when she was teasing Kirino. Her cheeks were flushed and both her eyes were ablaze. After all was said and done, these two sure were good for each other.

“Ahaha, haha... well, you two sure haven’t changed.”

And Saori finally let out a laugh.

“..... I’m honestly ratherrelieved.”

### Chapter 3: Part 5

It was after school the next day.

“Manami, let’s head back.”

“Ah, sorry, Kyouchan. I... have other plans today.”

“Wha? Again? ... What’s wrong? You seem really busy lately.”

“... It’s all Kyouchan’s fault though...”

“?”

What the hell?

Manami had ditched me, so I went home by myself. I changed into my street shoes and headed for the school gate.

Sometimes I forgot, but I was a student preparing to take his college exams. I really should go home and study.

I walked home by my lonesome with my shoulders drooped, when I heard a voice from behind me.

“..... Umm...”

“Hm? Ah... Kuroneko.”

Turning around, I saw Kuroneko standing there.

“I saw you walking home alone... so I caught your attention.”

“I see. Well, let’s walk together then.”

“..... Okay.”

Kuroneko gave me a small nod. For some reason, even her incredibly mundane actions seemed pretty cute.

I wonder if there’s anybody who understands how I felt?

Ugh... dammit. I had casually invited her like I usually did...

But I'm alone with Kuroneko! What should I do?! I'm so nervous!

"....."

And in true Kuroneko fashion, even though she had been the one to get my attention earlier, Kuroneko was now silent... but now might be a good chance to ask her about that kiss...

"Hey..."

"... W-What is it?"

"... No, never mind..."

"..... I see."

Sorry, I just can't. I just can't ask her... I mean, if I was really misunderstanding things, it would be embarrassing, right?

We walked home together for a bit longer like that. But then I realized that there was one other thing on my mind.

It was something I was planning on asking at some point anyways, and I realized now I could ask it pretty naturally.

"Hey, Kuroneko, about Saori..."

"Eh?"

"I mean, yesterday, she just didn't seem very happy, did she? I was wondering if there was anything we could do about that..."

"Ah... that matter."

"That matter... that's a really cold way of putting it. She's your friend, isn't she?"

".... Hmph... actually, your little sister and I talked about it thoroughly just last night."

“You and Kirino?”

“Yes. She looked worried too. Just like you right now.”

“I see...”

You two have quite a bit in common.

“Shut up. So? What did you figure in the end?”

“I’ll tell you... but I’m sure it’s similar to what you’re thinking right now.”

“I see.”

So Kirino and Kuroneko had both thought the same thing.

Well, it’s not like that was unexpected.

After all... this was a friend we were talking about.

### Chapter 3: Part 6

The next weekend, we broke from our normal habits and took an expedition out of the prefecture.

I took one step out from the shade and my eyes met with the glaring sunlight. The sunlight was strong, and it was a pleasant day to be lightly dressed. The shopping district that extended from the station had narrow streets, and was filled with an atmosphere of cleanliness.

We turned around a corner and saw an upwards slope that seemed to continue to the heavens. I couldn't see the end of it.

I spoke while looking at the map I was holding.

"From the address, we can just head straight up here."

"We're seriously going up this hill?" asked Kirino, sounding displeased.

"How saddening. I wasn't intending this to be a training trip."

Following Kirino's example, Kuroneko let out a sigh, dressed in her Gothic Lolita outfit. I've always wondered how she could survive in this hot weather in such heavy clothes. I mean, it wasn't like she was being serious when she claimed she was using demonic energy to erect a barrier around her. But it was hard for me to just tell her to strip, so I just checked on her now and then.

"Let me know if you're feeling tired. We can take a break in the middle."

"Oh my, how kind of you, *senpai*."

"Well, that's what senpai are supposed to do."

When her remark didn't faze me, Kuroneko blinked with surprise and averted her eyes.



On the other hand, my little sister was in an awful mood. She crossed her arms and glared at me.

“You, don’t you care about how I feel too?”

“You’re wearing light clothes though.”

Today, Kirino was wearing shorts so short that the base of her buttocks was almost visible.

Her outfit was really revealing... and it made her stand out a lot. There was also a girl wearing a Gothic Lolita outfit next to me, so I could definitely feel people staring at us.

Although, this happened whenever I went somewhere with these two, so I was completely used to it...

“Although, if you expect to train yourself, I hope you’re not giving up just at the sight of a hill like this.”

“Eh, of course not.”

Kirino tapped the front of her shoe on the ground with a proud expression. It looked like she had cheered up a bit, but she then turned towards me. “You, go buy some drinks. Some water or tea. And bring enough for everyone.”

“Yeah yeah.”

I did as I was ordered and headed for a vending machine.

We began walking up the gently sloping hill. We were in what was obviously a residential district, and there wasn’t a single store in sight. Other than houses, there was just a certain famous school, for girls from rich families, a public park, and a post office.

We were in what looked like a really high-class district, but to a commoner like me it just all seemed a little inconvenient...

“..... but seriously, all these houses are just huge...”

“... Well, when I heard the address, I imagined it would be something like this.”

“Does that swirly-swirly four-eyes really live in this kind of place?”

Kirino looked back at the almost palatial mansion we just passed, expressing her doubt.

Of course, by swirly-swirly four-eyes, she meant Saori...

Maybe it's about time I explained what we were doing.

Indeed, the place we were headed for right now was Saori's house.

Seeing Saori sad like that made us want to cheer her up, so we bought a present we thought she would like and everyone went over to her house to hang out... it wasn't the most intricate plan, but that's what we went with.

Ever since that one time, I seemed to have fallen to relying on presents for every occasion.

But I mean, I didn't think that was a bad thing. And both Kirino and Kuroneko probably agreed.

How did we know Saori's address, you ask? Well, there was that time a while back when Kirino got a box full of Meruru doujinshi from Saori. And on the shipping slip were written what was probably Saori's real name and address.

First, we thought we would call her in advance to let her know we were coming, but Kirino and Kuroneko both insisted that it would be more fun if we surprised her, and I gave in.

Well, to be honest, I'd thought that it would be more fun that way, too. I mean, after all...

-

**“Well, haha, I’m a bit embarrassed. Truth is, this was the first time I organized something like an offline meeting... so I wanted to make a good impression on everyone and did my best to make a character appropriate for a leader... I mean, normally I’m a bit more reserved than this.”**

-

Saori when she wasn’t dressed like an otaku...

Her “true form”...

This might be a rare opportunity to see it.

We continued walking through this high-class residential district for a few minutes before finally arriving at the address we had written down.

We were faced with a three-story mansion. Though it didn’t feel as high-class as some of the huge mansions we passed on the way over, the well-kept white house didn’t have a speck of dirt on it, and its calm and elegant façade blended right into the block.

Perhaps it was just because of a slight breeze, but I could faintly smell the beach.

The sea was close by.

“It’s here?”

“Saori lives here?”

“Probably.”

I answered Kirino’s question with a bit of uncertainty in my voice. I mean, to think that a person like Saori was living in such a fashionable place like this... I just couldn’t imagine it.

Also, if she walked around a place like this looking like such an otaku, I’m sure she would stick out like a sore thumb!

“Anyways. Let’s just go in then.”

Kuroneko urged me on. I could feel a silent pressure from her for me to go in first.

“A-Alright.”

Right next to the automatic gate was an intimidating black computer terminal. It was an intercom with a numeric keypad.

It seemed that the mansion gate was locked, and without the host’s permission we couldn’t even get into the mansion grounds.

“What should we do?”

“What should we do... well, all we can do is type in the room number into that thing and ask the people in the house to let us in.”

“... Hmph, if it was an apartment or a normal house, we could have gone straight up to the front door and surprised her. To think that otaku girl would live in a house with this much security...”

“Why don’t you just use that ‘Power of Darkness’ or whatever that you’re so proud about?”

Kirino cheerily poked fun at Kuroneko.

“... Hmph. Unfortunately, that isn’t a power I can just use freely in a public place like this.”

“Yeah yeah, good for you Jakigan-san.”

Just like Saori had been saying, I was gradually coming to see their arguments as just their version of flirting. Unlike before, I saw now that these two got along really well.

“Hey, what are you doing? Punch in the room number already.”

Rushed by my sister, I reached for the number key, when I stopped. “Ah.”

“What? What’s wrong?”

"I don't know the room number."

"Huh?"

"I mean, it wasn't on the packing slip. All that was written on there was the address of this house. There wasn't anything about a room number."

"Seriously? So you don't even know where Saori's room is? Are you an idiot?"

"Taking so long to realize this... senpai is such a blockhead."

"H-Hey! Don't put this all on me!"

We suddenly started panicking at this new predicament and making a fuss outside the mansion.

Here we were, a hopeless high school guy, a girl in a Gothic Lolita outfit, and a girl with her buttocks pretty much showing having a loud argument. No matter how you looked at it, we definitely looked suspicious.

-

"You three over there! What are you doing?!"

-

A loud, commanding voice boomed out from behind us.

"Uwah!"

Crap, did a security guard find us? We cowered and turned around, but what we found was not something as simple as a security guard. No, what we found was...

"W-Why is there a military soldier in a rich district like this?!"

It was a soldier, covered from head to foot in camouflage. The soldier's face was hidden behind a hat and a pair of sunglasses.

He... no, from the voice it was a she... she was holding a rifle, and was pointing that glistening black gun at us.

“Freeze!!”

“Uwoooooohhhh!!!”

We immediately threw our hands up in surrender.

The riflewoman slowly set the rifle on her shoulder and aimed it at Kirino.

“I’ll blow that pretty round face of yours right off!”

“Kyah!”

Kirino cowered when she was aimed at. I immediately leapt out to protect my sister.

“Stop it!”

However, no matter how long I waited, the shot never came...

“H-Huh?”

A subdued silence stretched on and on, until...

“Ha.”

The soldier suddenly burst out laughing.

“Aha, hahahahaha! I see, I see. ‘Stop it,’ was it?”

“..... Eh?”

We had no idea what was going on. The soldier pointed her rifle up into the sky and shot it off.

*Pop pop pop pop.* It was the sound of a BB gun, not a real rifle.

“I was joking.” The soldier took off her hat and gave us a wry smile. “Sorry for scaring you.”

She was beautiful. Her hair was long, and those sunglasses really looked good on her. She had a pretty strong-built body (and she was even taller than I was), so she exuded the atmosphere of a mercenary with a long history of military service.

".... A-Ahh..." I still didn't really know what was going on. "W-What the..." I heard Kirino sighing in relief behind me. And then...

"H-Hmph, I realized from the beginning that your gun was a fake. That was quite a fun show you put on."

Liar. I glanced at you for a second at the start, and you were completely surprised and close to tears.

"But my my, I was treated to the beautiful love between a brother and sister. Thank you."

"Ugh..."

I suddenly realized that I was still standing in front of Kirino with my arms stretched out. Crap, this was really embarrassing...

But I mean, seeing a soldier in a place like this would naturally make a man lose his sense of judgment. I guess it was true that there were weirdos no matter where you went.

I was still shaken, but I asked a question.

"Umm... so who are you? Do you live here or something?"

"Hm? Well, something like that. What about you lot then? Forgive me for being blunt, but you're all quite suspicious."

"No, I think when it comes down to it, you're definitely more suspicious."

Yeah, that was definitely true.

"Hm, well you know, I was over there playing a survival game by myself when I saw these strange three people arguing in front of my house. So I thought I would come over and tease them a bit."

“Hmph, do you not have any friends?”

Kirino said something unbelievable. Even if you believe that, don’t say it out loud!

But to play a survival game alone...

This huge girl... in the middle of the day on a weekend... what a lonely game to be playing.

“Haha, thanks for the biting retort.”

She should have felt like she was just pierced with a dagger, but this girl seemed happy instead. What was up with her? She reminded me of someone...

“So, I guess we’re both suspicious then. Mind if I ask you why you’re here?”

“Umm...”

I made eye contact with the other two. Kirino and Kuroneko both nodded simultaneously.

In other words, they wanted me to explain. Yeah yeah, fine fine.

“Actually, one of our friends lives in this mansion here...”

And when I told her about our plan to show up suddenly and surprise her, she replied with an unexpected response.

“I see..... Which means, you must be Kyousuke-shi.”

“Y-Yes, I am.”

“And that Gothic Lolita girl is Kuroneko-shi. And this fashionable girl with the light brown hair is Kiririn-shi, am I right?”

“Y-You know about us?”

My little sister had been on her guard at the sight of this strange person, but it seemed she couldn’t ignore what she had just heard. The girl decked out in a survival game outfit turned her lips upwards into a ω shape.



“Of course. My little sister told me everything.”

“L-Little sister?”

Kuroneko was the one to reply with that question. It was like she couldn’t believe her ears and had to check just to make sure.

“Your little sister...”

And at that point, this huge girl dressed as a soldier smiled and introduced herself.

“I should have introduced myself earlier. My name is Makishima Kaori. Your friend ‘Saori’ is my little sister.”

**“W-Whaaaaa~~ ....”**

Kirino and I spoke out simultaneously. Kuroneko just stood there with her eyes widened.

Kirino then asked vigorously.

“Y-You’re Saori’s oneesan?!<sup>1</sup>”

“Yes. Thank you for taking care of my little sister.”

Kaori gave us a composed nod.

Now that she mentioned it, it’s true that there couldn’t have been that many huge women like this in the world. Her face and build also were quite like Saori’s. But the reason I hadn’t realized their relationship before was that the atmosphere that Kaori gave off was completely different than the one I was used to with Saori.

“Hm, Kyouusuke-shi, why are you staring at me so intently like that? Haha, could it be that you’re being charmed by my undeniable beauty?”

“You’re definitely that one’s sister!”

---

<sup>1</sup> Honorific for older sister.

They both said stuff like that... well, granted, it was pretty clear even through her sunglasses that Kaori was pretty. Kuroneko seemed to agree with me.

“... Hmph, certainly. When it comes to walking around in weird clothing acting like everything’s fine, you’re exactly like your sister.”

And you’re the kind of person who’s willing to spit poison like that even when you first meet someone.

Kirino crossed her arms and mumbled.

“Yeah, what a weird gun otaku...”

“Hey, you guys, why do you always have to be so rude?!”

“Hahaha, don’t worry about it Kyouzuke-shi! I might like this, but I’m fairly used to insults myself. At any rate, the friends I usually hang out with are all pretty foulmouthed.”

Kaori looked at Kirino and Kuroneko. Kirino and Kuroneko stared back in bewilderment. I let out a bitter chuckle.

“So there are other people like these two? I can’t believe it. So? Are you going to say something like ‘So please feel free to abuse me more’?”

“Precisely.”

The corners of her lips turned upwards and she nodded happily.

It was like we were acting out the same scene as that time when we had all first met.

This was weird. She *felt* completely different than Saori, but it was almost like I was talking to a friend I knew. This must be the magic of siblings.

“Well, in any case, thank you very much for coming all this way... but unfortunately, Saori is out right now. There was something she had to do at school.”

“School? On a weekend?”

“Yes. Did you see that building when you came here? There’s a girl’s school there, and my little sister goes to high school there. By the way, there’s also a college in the same grounds, and that’s where this delicate flower goes to school.”

She pointed at herself... don’t call yourself a delicate flower, dammit.

“Hmm...”

“What’s wrong?”

Kaori cocked her head to the side and looked at me. I shrugged.

“Well, I was just worrying about what I would do if you were younger than me too... but I see, you’re in college.”

I looked Kaori over and nodded.

“Yeah, it’s pretty obvious actually when I take a good look at you.”

“I... I see...”

*Krchh.* I saw a vein pop in Kaori’s temple.

Next, I found the muzzle of the gun pointed right at my forehead.

“Ah?”

But before I could even ask her what was wrong...

*Bang bang bang bang bang!* BB pellets pounded again and again into my forehead.

“O-Owowowowow!!”

“Oops, my hand slipped.”

### Chapter 3: Part 7

A few minutes later, Kaori brought us to the second floor of the mansion.

“You came all this way, so if I sent you back without at least serving you some tea, my little sister would get angry at me.”

Kaori had given us that invitation. To be honest, I also wanted to know a bit more about Saori... for example, what kind of house she lived in. So I gratefully decided to take advantage of Kaori’s hospitality. Kirino and Kuroneko probably felt the same way.

“Hmm... so you live alone with your sister?”

“Yes, we used the fact that we had to school so we could live apart from our parents.”

Kuroneko had suddenly started chatting casually with Kaori. Kuroneko was usually a shy person, but she could probably smell a familiar “scent” off Kaori, which allowed her to talk with Kaori normally.

We walked down a pristine, spotless hallway, and Kirino spoke.

“I haven’t seen a single room with a nameplate yet in this mansion...”

“Which rooms are yours?”

I asked Kaori, and she turned around.

“Hm? Well, our parents own this mansion, and we’re just using it, so...”

“So all of them?!”

“Yes, pretty much.”

Well, that’s pretty amazing.

“Hmm, well then you can really put a lot of goods on display. But cleaning up must be hard.”

Kirino spoke casually, and Kaori nodded.

“Fufu, quite right Kiririn-shi. Just as you said, this mansion is the place of my prized gallery. And what good timing. I can show all of you my collection! Come right in!”

Puffing out her huge chest with pride, Kaori beckoned us into a room.

And what we saw inside that room was...

“Uwah....” “..... Oh my.” “Hyah?!”

The room was designed like a one kitchen... well no, there wasn't a kitchen here. In any case, there was only one room, but that one room was insanely huge. I wonder how many square meters this measured.

It was almost as if the room had been designed from the beginning to fulfill its current purpose.

There were large glass cases along the room's walls and in the room's center. Those glass cases were filled with large numbers of plastic models from robot anime. And on the book shelves there were DVDs and books from the same anime lined up neatly in rows.

From the ceilings were hanging wires that supported a number of battleships and space colonies (I guess that's what these were called?). It was almost as if the entire room had been turned into a diorama of a battlefield.

And what's more, the hallway that led up to the room was filled with the boxes for the plastic models.

It was a masterpiece, even from the viewpoint of a beginner like me. An otaku sibling pair... I muttered, half exasperated.

“... It must be pretty hard to go to the bathroom with all this...”

“What's up with this plastic model room?! Amazing!”

“Hahaha, isn't it?! Isn't it?!”

Kirino's eyes sparkled with admiration, and Kaori nodded repeatedly, looking satisfied.

She looked incredibly happy, and I recalled seeing something like this before

Of course, that was in my little sister's room.

When she was showing off her prized collection to people who could appreciate her hobby.

This must have been supreme bliss for otaku.

"I saw a special collection of otaku rooms from overseas in a book once, and this is my answer to them! Fufufuhaha! Just because you have a bit more space and can put your collections into your huge rooms, don't think you've won against me! I'm not jealous! It's just that there are good and bad ways to use big rooms! In the end, it's all about concept! I'll show them that pure space is not enough to win this battle!"

She was seriously noisy. She was getting way too worked up over this.

As Kaori gave her impassioned speech, Kirino gazed at her collection with an expression of admiration.

"Wow, this is the Red Comet's helmet!"<sup>1</sup>

"... And here are some sunglasses modeled after the ones worn by Quattro Bajeeena."<sup>2</sup>

Kuroneko expressionlessly bent forwards and prodded the glass case with her finger.

"Actually, the sunglasses I'm wearing are like that too."

"Hmm..."

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<sup>1</sup> Reference to Char Aznable, a character from the Gundam series.

<sup>2</sup> Another Gundam character.

Kuroneko proceeded nonchalantly.

“You say all this is your collection, but could it be that Saori’s things are also mixed in here? Surely the reason she has that ridiculous handle-name can be found here.”

“Hm? Ah, yes, of course her things are also mixed in here! Ah, I see, I wasn’t being very precise. This isn’t my collection here, this is ‘our collection.’”

“... Hm, I see.”

I could see Kuroneko’s suggestive smile reflected in the glass case.

Kirino appeared to remember something.

“Ah, right. We should give you the present while we still remember it.”

“Yeah, that’s true.”

I agreed, and I took out the presents we had bought.

“Presents?” Kaori cocked her head to the side.

“Yeah, we each bought Saori a present.”

“That’s quite generous of you. But why exactly? Today isn’t my sister’s birthday, nor is it any special occasion...”

“Oh my. So we have to have a special reason to bring a present?”

“She brought us Meruru cookies earlier. Also, this is the first time we’re visiting a friend’s house, so isn’t it natural we bring a gift?”

“Yeah, exactly. I also got a computer from her. I mean, she’s always taking care of us... but more importantly, she’s our friend. Could you take a look at it too? You know a lot about plastic models, right?”

I handed over the “HG 1/144 Susanoo” box I was holding to Kaori, and she reacted dramatically.

“Oh, this... this is...!”

“Just remember, it’s not your present.”

“I know! I will take responsibility for it and give it to my little sister! But haha.....  
Kyouusuke-shi, this is quite a nice choice you’ve made!”

“Saori is always building these plastic models... so I thought it would be nice to get her one. We all went to buy presents together. I’m not too sure of it, but I tried to pick something I thought looked cool... and I thought maybe this one would make Saori happy.”

“Ahh, it’ll definitely make her happy. I’m willing to bet on that.”

“... Alright.. Then I’m glad.”

After me, Kuroneko handed over her present.

“Ah, a Deathscythe! That’s quite like Kuroneko-shi.”

And then, finally...

“I guess I’m going last. Let me just say that those two presents were just appetizers. The plastic model I chose is definitely going to be the best.”

“Ah, that’s quite exciting.” Kaori smiled.

“You should be excited. Take a look.”

Kirino looked very proud of herself as she passed over the box.

“Tadaa~! It’s the one Kugimiya Rie-chan<sup>3</sup> rode in 00!”

“No, that’s the one Nena rode! Not the one Kugimiya Rie-chan rode!”

Kaori vigorously corrected her. I didn’t really know what was going on, but it seemed that this was one point she wasn’t about to let go.

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<sup>3</sup> A seiyuu I expect most of you to know.



“W-What are you getting angry for?”

“All I’m saying is you shouldn’t confuse the seiyuu with the characters they voice. I can forgive the fact that you jumped the bandwagon on your choice of Gundam, but you shouldn’t mess up the name of the pilot or machine. You really need more passion! Passion!”

“I really don’t see what’s wrong with just calling it the Kugimiya Gundam.”

“Kugimiya Gundam?! T-This is why seiyuu freaks are so... I can feel my soul being pulled down by the earth’s gravity...”<sup>4</sup>

“I mean, you don’t have to take it so seriously...”

Kirino looked pretty bewildered, but I mean... I really didn’t think she was one to talk here.

After all, Kaori’s reaction here was exactly the same as her reaction when Kuroneko made fun of Meruru.

Otaku were people who held a particularly strong conviction in their beliefs, and so even things that might appear trivial to us could elicit a strong reaction. That was one lesson I had definitely learned over the past year.

“But anyways, just open it. It’s really amazing!”

“Hm? It’s not just a normal plastic model?”

Kaori took the box from Kirino. Looking a bit confused, she opened it.

And then...

“Wha-?! T-This is...”

Kaori’s body stiffened; she seemed at a loss for words.

“It’s amazing, isn’t it?! So? What do you think? Hm?”

---

<sup>4</sup> Apparently a famous line in Gundam.

“Uhh... wait... just hold on a second...”

Kirino closed in with a face beaming with pride, but Kaori held Kirino back with her palm and just stood there, shaken.

“Well, first of all... umm... why is this already finished?!”

“Huh? That a bad thing?”

“Alright, Kiririn-shi... I’m only going to say this once, so be sure you hear me... plastic models aren’t just for decorating. The real pleasure of plastic models comes from happily building one with your own two hands! If you give me a completed model like this, you take away half the fun!”

“That’s so annoying! Plastic modelers are so weird!”

I really agreed. It was hard for light users like me to understand the thoughts of otaku and other hardcore hobbyists. But at the same time, I’m sure Kaori didn’t want to hear that from Kirino.

“Ugh... just look at this... this is just criminal...”

Kaori held the model that Kirino had finished in her hands and began her laundry list of complaints.

“First of all, I just can’t stand the fact that all you did was use nippers to cut off the parts and build this up. You didn’t use sandpaper. You didn’t paint it, you didn’t test assemble it... what part of this is a plastic model?”

“Oh also, I had lots of parts left over.”

“That’s outrageous!”

*Pant... pant...* Kaori’s shoulders shook up and down and her breathing was ragged. On the other hand, Kirino was completely calm and collected.

“You know, you seem a lot more short-tempered than Saori.”

“Ugh... S-Saori definitely would agree with me!”

“I wonder if she would...”

“She would! A-Also... even if I give you a huge benefit of the doubt here and ignore the fact that you already assembled this... what is this...”

A vein popped out of Kaori’s temple as she blew up.

“What the hell are all these sparkles everywhere?!”

“That? Ehehe... I decorated the Gundam a bit! Isn’t it reaaaally cute?!”

“Decorate... Gundam... that’s...”

*Arghhhhh...* Kaori floppily covered her face with her hands and shook back and forth.

To explain, Kirino had pasted huge amounts of the glitter and glass beads that junior high girls tended to like on Gundam, to the point where it looked just like a huge colony of acorn barnacles.

Why in the world did junior high school girls like such flashy, disgusting decorations like this?

“H-Hey Kaori... are you alright?”

“Sorry... Kyoussuke-shi... this was just... this was just way more than I had imagined...”

“Here, sit down in this chair. Come on...”

I let Kaori lean on me and slowly sat her down in a chair that looked like the captain’s chair on some space battleship. And she just sat there, with her head hung sadly.

“Hm? What’s wrong?”

Don’t act so confused! You’re the one who did something horrible to a Gundam fanatic!

Kuroneko whispered in my ear.

“... This is so awkward. Do something.”

“... I know...”

I hurriedly looked around the room, and spoke up to Kaori.

“I-I mean, this really is a pretty amazing collection of plastic models! If you have this many, maintaining all of them must be a real hassle.”

“I-I guess. But that isn’t painful at all. Kyouzuke-shi, when I am tending to my collection, it is a time of supreme bliss for me.”

“Is that so?”

“Yes!”

I see. When she agreed so vigorously like that, I couldn’t really say much in response.

“Well, I’m sorry for the bother, but could you teach me? How to make a plastic model correctly.”

“Hm... well, I suppose I can. I’ll give you a lesson then!”

Alright, she cheered up! I sure have gotten pretty good at handling otaku.

Although I was momentarily really happy about that, I had completely forgotten how longwinded and annoying otaku could be when they started talking...

Thirty minutes later...

“So, after you go through all that, you assemble the parts you numbered some time ago...”

“And then... we’re finally done?”

“Well, then you have to design the place you’re going to use to display it.”

“I-I see.”

How long would it be before we're done?! Ugh, I'm tired... This is getting really tedious... and I was the one who told her to teach me, so it's not like I can tell her to stop...

"Well, that's a bit of a different topic, so in regards to making plastic models, I suppose we can stop there."

"... Ah..."

I'm relieved. I'm finally being let go...

"Hmm... I ended up talking for a long time..."

Having been cheered up after talking about her hobby at length, Kaori reclined back deeply on her chair.

"Finishing with all the maintenance, sitting in this chair, and just gazing at my collection... and then suddenly, you realize the entire day's gone by..."

"I know! That's soooo true!"

And there was one person in the room who passionately agreed.

"I feel that too! If all of this were Meruru figures instead, I really think I could just stay in this room my entire life staring at them!"

She seriously must be sick.

"Also! You must have other things in your collection, right?! You do, right?! Show me!"

"I know where you're coming from, but calm down, Kirino!"

I caught my sister by the arms as she tried to charge at Kaori like an excited buffalo, and I pinned her arms behind her back.

"Idiot! How could someone like you understand where I'm coming from?!"

"Ow...!! You stepped on my toes, you bitch!"

How long has it been since she's delivered that attack at me?! It almost feels nostalgic!

As Kirino and I bickered with each other, Kuroneko ignored us and spoke nonchalantly.

"If you do have more of this collection, I would like to see too."

"Sure. But before that..."

Kaori reached her arm out and gestured towards some three-legged chairs. She seemed to be telling us to sit.

"Can you cut it out and let me serve you tea already?"

### Chapter 3: Part 8

Thirty minutes later, we were in a different room in the same mansion.

“This mansion was originally remodeled to display my father’s art collection. We’re being allowed to use one part of it.”

It seemed that every room was a gallery based on a different concept. I had yet to find any room equipped with the normal necessities of living, but those rooms probably existed too, somewhere... right? And the room we were in right now was...

“This room is so broken down!”

“Did this used to be an arcade at some point...?”

Kirino and Kuroneko both gave their frank impressions.

It was probably deliberate, but both the floor under us and the walls had the concrete bare and showing.

There was a retro atmosphere filling the entire room, and the first things I noticed were the old-fashioned arcade machine and CRT television. There was a cable extending from the television, and connected to a black game machine I did not recognize.

A toy track also wove its way between all that equipment.

“This is a room meant to recreate a scene you might see during the late Showa or early Heisei period.<sup>1</sup> Back then, they would put arcade machines in the middle of cheap sweet shops and those shops would become hangouts for local elementary and junior high schoolers. That was a time when games like Final Attack and Golden Axe were still being actively played. Well, I guess even now, you can find places where they’re still being actively played too.”

How old was this damn girl?

---

<sup>1</sup> Showa is 1926 to 1989, while Heisei is 1989 and afterwards.

“What’s this black game system here?”

Kuroneko asked. If she didn’t even know, then it must have been a pretty old system...

“It’s a Neo Geo CD. From what I’ve heard, it’s a frightening piece of hardware that takes three minutes to load a single match. The more relaxed gamers of today probably don’t understand, but it was quite a groundbreaking achievement when people could play Samurai Spirits or King of Fighters in their own homes.”

“?! T-This is... this is the machine that some say is the symbol of the SNK Golden Age?! This is the first time I’ve seen one.”

Kuroneko leaned in close stared at the Neo Geo CD with widened eyes. I didn’t really know what was going on, but this machine was probably something special to gamers.

“Oh, what’s this thing?”

What I caught sight of was a square glass case table. Inside the case were lined small rubber dolls that you would perhaps expect to find in Gashapon<sup>2</sup> machines. They were all of things you would see in fantasy novels, like monsters and elves and knights.

“Hohoh, nice eye, Kyouusuke-shi. Those are from the ‘Neclos Fortress’ toy line. They’re not as popular as the Bikkuri Man Seals, but they’re one of the representative toys of the Showa period and came packaged with certain food products. To people who collect these type of toys, they still enjoy a deeply rooted popularity, and are still very actively being sold at auction.”

“Ahh...”

So there was quite a history here. They were things from long ago, but they did look pretty cool. I could see how they would’ve been popular.

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<sup>2</sup> Gashapon refers to those machines that hold all those plastic balls with prizes inside.



Also, I didn't know about these "Golden Axe" and "Bikkuri Man" things she was using to explain herself, so I wasn't sure if I really understood what she was trying to say.

"By the way, you probably can't tell from across the glass, but if you touch them and warm them with your fingers, the Neclos dolls change color. I guess it's kind of like the secret emblems they put on the Transformers toys that were popular in the eighties. Changing colors based on temperature was a really trendy gimmick back then."

Seriously, how old was this girl? Was she a time traveler from the Shouwa era or something?

"What about this?"

Kirino pointed to a racing car toy that had been casually set on top of the arcade machine.

Ah, I actually knew what that was.

I took that *bodiless* blue racing car into my hands and spoke with a soft voice.

"How nostalgic... it's a mini four-wheeler, isn't it?"

"Ohh, so you already know, Kyouzuke-shi?"

"They were pretty popular at one point when I was a kid. But I've never really seen something quite like this..."

"Haha, I'm not surprised. That's an Avante Jr., and it's the fastest, best car in the first generation of these four-wheelers. This toy was based on the model that they really used in the Japan Cup back then, I think. The fanatics who got into this culture from the second generation might burn me alive for saying this, but I still think that an Avante that's perfectly tuned up is the fastest car."

Why the hell was she telling me this... I mean, at this point, the only people who would actually understand what she was saying were probably all middle-aged men.

There was no way Kaori could know what I was thinking, but she curled her mouth up into a ω shape and summed up.

“In anime, in games, and in all these other genres, it’s just amazing how much the technology has improved. Things that people could only dream of in the Shouwa period are completely commonplace today. However, I still think that it would be a shame if we just forgot about all the things that kept us so engrossed back then, and wrote them off as ‘relics.’ I’m not saying we should obsess over the olden days, but in the end, fun things are fun, and worthwhile things are worthwhile. Being in this room drives that point home for me. That’s why I like this place.”

### Chapter 3: Part 9

They say that everyone has an internal vision for their own paradise.

For example, for me, that paradise would consist of a porch in a fairly small garden, with the warm sun shining overhead.

Of course, Kuroneko, Saori, Akagi, and Sena all probably had their own versions of paradise.

But right now, what stretched before my eyes was certainly Kirino's Garden of Eden.

"Ooo, ooo... what's with this place... this is such a paradise..."

My little sister was clinging to a glass case and seemed to have lost her mind. She was staring fixedly at a collection that had shot her right through the heart.

It was seriously a bit disgusting. This girl's fans would have a heart attack if they saw her like this.

Yes, this was the "Bishoujo Figure Room." Starting from Meruru, various types of figures were crammed in display cases. I couldn't really blame Kirino for getting like this.

"Hey, you, cut it out. We've been here for more than ten minutes already. Let's move to another room, okay?"

"I-I'm going to stay here a bit longer! You guys can go on ahead!"

Kirino said that and showed no signs of moving from the front of the glass case. Her palm and nose were pressed firmly against the glass, and I could almost see her drooling. She was like a kid in a toy store.

Or to use another example, she was like Akagi when he was trying to decide whether or not to buy a love doll.

"Geez..... this girl is just..."

And it was right then.

The room began to shake around us.

“Oh?” “W-What?” “This is...”

Kaori, Kuroneko, and I all looked around.

“Uwah...”

Kaori lost her balance and began to fall forwards. At that moment, pairs of glasses of all types fell from the pocket of her survival vest.

What the hell were up with those glasses?! But before I could ask her that, an even stronger tremor went through the room.

“Whoa there...”

The figures shook and rattled in their cases. This was...

Kirino stayed pressed against the glass case and muttered, spellbound.

“Fwah... all the Meruru are moving... did my prayers get answered...?”

“It’s an earthquake, you idiot! Snap out of it! Are you tripping and having hallucinations or something?!”

As I yelled at her in a rush, I grabbed my little sister by the shoulders and pulled her into an embrace. We stood there and braced ourselves for the earthquake together.

“This is a big one!”

“... I-If the glass cases fall, it might be bad...”

Kuroneko was the one who pointed out that danger. She was squatting there and looking up at me with a pale face.

“T-That’s true. Hey, Kirino, Kaori...”

I checked that everyone was safe... and when I did that, I saw that Kaori was struggling to find her sunglasses, which had fallen off onto the floor when she had lost her balance. It might have been that her eyes weren't good and they were prescription sunglasses. I began to move to help her, but then...

"There they are!"

Kaori grabbed her sunglasses and put them on. And then I saw that they weren't sunglasses...

They were swirly eyeglasses that felt quite familiar to me. It was one of the pairs of glasses which had fallen out in huge quantities from her vest. Seeming to have regained her vision, Kaori shouted energetically.

"Everyone! It's dangerous here! We're moving outside!"

"I don't wanna! If the glass cases fall and break, all these Meruru are going to die...!"

Kirino shouted as she pressed on a glass case and tried to prevent it from falling.

Was she an idiot?! Just leave those things be... but I really couldn't tell this girl that! Dammit!

I ground my teeth, at a loss, but Kaori persuaded Kirino in my place.

"Don't worry, Kiririn-shi! Earthquakes are the collector's worst enemy! There are anti-quake protections in place!"

"But, but... they're really shaking around a lot...!"

"Please listen! Friends are more important to me!"

"!!"

Kirino heard Kaori's shout and her eyes widened.

"We're leaving!" "Hyah..."

I grasped Kirino's hand firmly and dashed towards the exit. Kuroneko and Kaori chased after me. We stumbled out of the room and grabbed onto a handrail in the hallway. And we held on and waited for the shaking to stop...

The earthquake subsided soon after that.

"..... Phew..... i-it stopped..."

Kuroneko was holding onto the handrail just like me and she let out a sigh of relief. To be honest, she had been the most afraid when the room was shaking. But everyone had one or two fears.

"H-Hey, how long are you going to keep holding my hand?"

"Ah, sorry."

Kirino shook my hand off. And then both she and I let out a sigh of relief.

Kaori wiped off her forehead, still wearing her swirly eyeglasses.

"Phew... that was quite some shaking back there... But I'm glad to see everyone seems safe."

"....."

.....

"You..... you're Saori, aren't you?"

"Ah!"

I thought she was going to scream, but she quickly turned away from us.

She quickly took off her swirly glasses and switched back to her original sunglasses. And then...

"Hmph, what are you saying, Kyouzuke-shi? I'm Saori's older sister, Kaori..."

"No, you've already been found out..."

She really didn't know when to quit. I casually reached out towards Kaori... I mean Saori... and grabbed her sunglasses.

I lightly plucked them off, and then...

**"KYAH!!"**

Saori screamed and crouched down, covering her face with both hands.

"..... Huh?"

..... What was up with that shy reaction? This was Saori... right?

I held the sunglasses in my hands and stood there dumbfounded. Kirino and Kuroneko seemed surprised at Saori's sudden change, and both their eyes widened.

"Y-Y-You... w-why are you making Saori cry...?"

"Huh?! This is my fault?!"

"I didn't really see it too well, but you just groped Saori's butt or something, didn't you?"

"You too, Kuroneko?!"

All I did was take off her glasses! And I mean, I'm just as confused as to why Saori was acting like some maiden who just got her skirt lifted up!

"A-Anyways, this is your fault, so do something about it..."

"A-Alright... umm, Saori?"

I called out gently, and Saori trembled in response, remaining crouched with her face covered by her hands.

... She was like a completely different person. I couldn't imagine seeing Saori like this normally.

“Sorry. I shouldn’t taken your sunglasses like that. Here, I’ll give them back to you.”

I held out her sunglasses, and Saori peeked out at me through the gap in between her fingers.

With a faint voice that was completely different from her tone up until a few moments ago, Saori quietly whispered.

“Umm... umm...”

“Hm?”

“.... Did you... see it?”

“See what?”

“..... My... my f-face.”

Ah, I see.

She... didn’t want us to see what her real face looked like.

That’s why she was acting all embarrassed like this.

“We didn’t see anything.”

“... R-Really?”

“Yeah, really.”

“I... see...”

She was hiding her face with her hands so I couldn’t see her expression, but I could tell that she was relieved.

So it was like that.

Everyone had their own problems. It was natural that anybody would have one or two things they wanted to hide.



It would be bad if I tried to expose those things just out of my own curiosity. I once again lowered my head, and I spoke sincerely.

“Please let me apologize again... I’m sorry.”

“... N-No, me too... doing this so suddenly... I-I’m sorry.”

This faint, almost vanishing voice, this meekness, this clumsy way of speaking...

All those things were different from the “Saori” I knew.

A cheerful voice, an easygoingness, and a flowing way of speaking...

That’s what I thought of when I pictured Saori in my mind.

If this was really her true self... then...

-

*I mean, normally I’m a bit more reserved than this.”*

-

That’s what she said when we first met... don’t tell me, that was actually true...?

How should I have known that? I always thought she was completely kidding.

### Chapter 3: Part 10

We had returned to the figure room.

“Ahh but I’m seriously sorry. I wasn’t planning on tricking everyone.”

Right after she put her swirly eyeglasses back on, Saori had immediately returned to her usual self.

There was not a trace left of the meek girl who had been crying before.

But as she had said once before, her behavior right now was probably just her wanting to make a character befitting of the leader of an otaku community.

And the masculine character she was playing a bit ago was probably not the “real” Saori either.

I was sure that, depending on what she was wearing (more specifically, her eyeglasses), she could play a number of characters.

At will.

Hearing Saori’s sincere apology, Kirino turned away, with a casual “well, whatever, it’s fine.”

Neither Kirino nor Kuroneko seemed to intend to pry farther into the “true” Saori that had peeked through for a moment.

Of course, I didn’t intend to pry either.

I would let Saori tell us as much as she wanted to of her own free will, but I wouldn’t try to go deeper.

“But more importantly, I’m really relieved that the Merurus are okay.”

The glass cases had been shaking around dreadfully, but it seemed that their anti-quake protections or whatever kept them safe. Half of the figures had fallen over, but none of the glass cases had toppled.

“Good... this one is also fine... no visible wounds...”

Kirino let out sighs of relief as she checked the figures one by one.

She really seemed incredibly worried about them... when she said “more importantly,” she wasn’t just being considerate... it was probably what she really thought.

“But really, why did you tell us... that you’re the older sister?”

Kuroneko asked in an indirect way... Rather than say Kuroneko wanted to sate her curiosity, it was better to say that she was trying to be considerate and make it easier for Saori to talk. Unlike Kirino.

“I never imagined that you would come visit me at my house, so I was really surprised... and then it just happened.”

Saori scratched her cheek awkwardly.

“So you just suddenly made a character and tried to give us the slip?”

“Yes. I was a bit hesitant to show you a side of me that I haven’t shown you before. Thinking about it now, there may have been better ways to deal with that.”

“There were.”

Kuroneko mumbled without expression. But her tone was very kind. I didn’t have to ask her to know what she was thinking. After all, I was thinking the same thing.

“No matter what character you try to act out, you’re still you. We don’t really see a difference.”

“Yeah, something like that.”

Even as she remained facing the other way, Kirino joined in.

But in the end, that’s how it was.

Saori had helped us out so much up until now. And we were such good friends.

There was no way we would stop liking her so easily. No matter what happened.

“I mean, there’s nothing you have to apologize for. You just decided that you were going to be a certain character in front of us and were just trying to keep that going.”

“Kiririn-shi...”

Saori sounded shocked. I was also surprised.

Kirino... she really understood Saori, didn’t she? I mean, when she put it like that... everything suddenly made complete sense. I was sure Kirino was right on. That’s why Saori tried to pretend to be her own sister.

“So, the ones who should be apologizing are us. Sorry for coming so suddenly and not even letting you know.”

“No! No no no! Please don’t apologize, Kyouzuke-shi!”

Saori panicked and waved both her hands around.

“I... I’m... I...”

It was rare to see Saori at a loss for words like this.

Saori scowled in frustration and then... she gave us a serious look.

“.....”

“... Saori?” “Hey...” “Huh? What’s wrong?”

We were all bewildered and asked her what was wrong, but Saori suddenly laughed.

It looked like she had just hit upon an unbelievably “good” idea.

An idea that tickled her so much that she just couldn’t help but laugh.

And then, she formed her usual ω shape with her mouth and put up one finger.

“Kiririn-shi, Kuroneko-shi, Kyouzuke-shi. You know, I have something that’s more interesting than the collection I’ve shown you so far.”

“Huh... e-even more interesting that these Meruru figures?”

Kirino looked surprised at how unnatural Saori was acting, but her interest seemed to have been piqued by Saori’s words. Saori slowly nodded.

“Yes... I feel like it’s something you all would enjoy.”

“Sounds interesting. What is it?”

-

“Let’s all go... cosplay together.”

-

**“Cosplay?!?!”**

We all uttered in unison.

“Yes. To tell you the truth, I had some costumes made that I was planning on asking everyone to wear next time. There’s a costume room next door. Fufu, Kiririn-shi... you said you had an interest in cosplay, didn’t you?”

“I do!”

Kirino answered instantly and energetically. I remembered seeing her eyes gleam when she was looking at cosplay at Summer Comiket.

“Kuroneko-shi, don’t you also ever want to wear a different outfit?”

“That’s... well, I’ll wear something for you, I suppose.”

Kuroneko suddenly blushed. “Yes, I really want to try,” is what one could translate her words to.

Saori clapped her hands, almost as if things had been settled.

“Well then, isn’t this a good opportunity? Let’s all cosplay together and take a photo to commemorate the occasion.”

“Ehh? We’re having a photo shoot here? What should I do~~? I’m a pro after all~~.”

Kirino waved from side to side and looked pretty proud of herself.

Even though she obviously wanted to go and take those cosplay photos.

“... Hmph, so these are costumes that Saori picked out? ... That worries me a bit.”

In true Kuroneko fashion, even though she said that, she was obviously pretty excited for this. I mean, she was already loosening some of her ribbons. Hey hey, I’m in the room, so please don’t strip right here...

The subject had been changed and we had all returned to our usual selves.

“Also, it’s been a while, but perhaps I will also take this opportunity to show you my own cosplay.”

“But you’re always cosplaying, aren’t you?”

“Haha, Kyouzuke-shi, if you say that, don’t blame me when you’re knocked to the floor by my beauty.”

“Hah, just keep talking.”

But I definitely was looking forward to seeing what kind of outfits those three would change into. I spoke cheerfully.

“Well then, I’ll wait here for you three.”

“Whatever are you saying, Kyouzuke-shi?”

“Eh?”

Saori took a look at my bewildered expression and gave me an ominous smile.

“Of course I’ve also prepared a costume for Kyouzuke-shi.”

.....

.... You’ve got to be kidding me.

### Chapter 3: Part 11

The girls would change in the costume room, and then come back to the figure room.

And in the meantime, I would change in this room.

Being left alone in this room like this made all those figures seem a bit eerie (sorry, Kirino). Especially all those Meruru figures that had toppled during the quake and were now looking at me with a smile... they were scary.

“Well then... maybe I should suck it up and just change.”

My name is Kousaka Kyouusuke, I’m eighteen years old, and this is my first cosplay.

Saori had prepared an outfit for me of a character that I recognized.

“... This cloak... how do I put it on?”

After a struggle, I managed to put things on, and looked at myself in the full-length mirror in the corner of the room.

“..... Wow.”

It feels a little weird for me personally to be saying this... but this costume suited me really well.

I felt my cheeks suddenly burning. What was up with this hard-to-describe feeling... and this sense of excitement?

As I looked at myself cosplaying in the mirror, I could feel my excitement quickly rise.

“Uwah... I look so awesome! Huh? Is this real? Is it just me, or do I just look really awesome?”

Don’t make fun of me! I’m sure everyone who cosplays for the first time feels like this!

I waved my cape in the same manner I had seen this character do in the show.

“Manifest yourself, Cerberus!”

I got carried away and even acted out his signature phrase.

Crap, I’m getting so worked up! Ugh, I couldn’t help myself there! But I look so awesome right now! But I also feel so embarrassed! Cosplaying really turns people into narcissists!

And then, right then...

*Creak.* I heard the sound of the door opening, and a chill ran right down my spine!

D-Dammit, I hope they didn’t hear me just now! Is it kill myself time?! Do I have to commit suicide now?!

My entire body went stiff as a board and I turned around with tears in my eyes, when...

”.....!!”

Both of us were at a loss for words.

“You... Kurone... is that Kuroneko?!”

The outfit Kuroneko was wearing also belonged to a character I knew well.

Alpha Omega... the rival character that often appeared in Stardust ☆ Witch Meruru, and also the character that Bridget was **always cosplaying**.

“Eh... Ah.... S-S-S-Shi... Shikoku...?”

I couldn’t blame Kuroneko for being surprised when she saw me either. The costume I was wearing was that of Shikoku, the protagonist of Kuroneko’s favorite anime, Maschera.

But I mean, and saying this myself is rather strange, I looked exactly like him. If they made a live action version of Maschera, maybe they should give me a call. Ah, but really, what was more important right now was...

We both stared at each other’s cosplays.



At that point, Kuroneko seemed to snap out of it.

“... P-Please... don’t look at me so much... it’s embarrassing...”

She blushed from ear to ear and hugged herself, trying to hide herself from view.

She was wearing a vampire’s cape, but her outfit was still very exposed. For someone as shy as Kuroneko, this must have been quite hard for her to wear.

“... I told you not to look at me. D-Do you want me to poke out your eyes?”

“S-Sorry.”

I hurriedly covered my eyes with both hands.

If she was this embarrassed about it, maybe she should have just not worn the outfit... maybe this was just the stubbornness of cosplayers...

“B-But more importantly... you... that costume...”

“A-Ahh. This costume is...”

I was a bit embarrassed, but I asked for her impressions.

“H-How is it? Kuroneko, what do you... what do you think about this costume...”

“E... Eh?”

Perhaps she was not expecting me to ask that question at all, but Kuroneko stiffened. Alpha’s costume was probably incredibly embarrassing for her to wear. Her face flushed even redder than it was before.

“I-It’s okay, I guess.”

Even as she said that, she glanced at me now and then. Kuroneko really liked this character, so even if it was me wearing it, she probably couldn’t help looking at the costume. To be honest, it felt nice.

“Hmph, don’t look so much at me. You’re making me blush.”

“Y-You idiot... it’s not like I’m... what in the world are you saying...?”

Kuroneko looked incredibly cute when she was annoyed like that.

And then... “What’s with those outfits?! You two look really nice!”

Kirino came into the room in high spirits. And her outfit surprised me even more.

“Well, either way, you’re still no match for me!”

Kirino picked up the hem of her skirt and twirled. The character that Kirino was cosplaying was the Queen of Nightmare, another character from Maschera.

Kirino was wearing the costume that Kuroneko usually wore.

Just that alone was enough to have a huge impact on me.

“.....”

Both Kuroneko and I were suddenly unable to speak.

“What is it? Do I entrance you?”

It’s not like I’m one to talk... but what a bloated sense of confidence. It really did seem that cosplaying made people into narcissists. Although this girl was always like this.

Also, I’m not going to say this out loud, but if you want my opinion of how Kirino looked in that Queen of Nightmare costume, well...

It is that she looked really cute, but those clothes did not suit her at all. I always thought that models could make any clothes look good, but to think that a Gothic Lolita costume could look so out of place on a person...

It was definitely the brown hair.

If Kirino had black or blonde hair, I feel that this outfit wouldn’t look so strange on her.

Kuroneko asked a question, round-eyed.

“You, didn’t you hate Maschera?”

“Hm? That doesn’t have to do anything with the clothes. I wanted to wear a Gothic Lolita outfit once to try it out.”

I see. If it meant wearing a cute cosplay, she didn’t care where the character was from.

“You..... just wanted to.....”

Kuroneko showed an incredibly unpleasant scowl.

“Just cosplaying so casually like that... even though the true thrill of cosplay is completely transforming into a character you like... you just don’t understand at all, do you?”

“Is it? Hm, completely transforming, huh...? Umm, like this?”

Kirino made a peace sign over one of her eyes and winked.

And she said the following in an innocent voice, almost like you would expect from a Meruru character.

“Kyahaa~~. I’m the Queen of Nightmare~! I came here from hell! Or something like that (^\_~^\*)”.

“The Queen would never say something like that!”

Kuroneko exploded. When it came to Maschera, she really had a short fuse. She was like a child here.

“U... Ugh... I think I’m really going to kill you this time...”

“But seriously, you’re also not Aru-chan at all! Aru-chan would never say something like ‘I’ll kill you.’”

“I-I’m... I never intended to become this character in the first place...”

“But wasn’t it that if you don’t become the character, you can’t experience the ‘true thrill’ of cosplay?”

“Ooo... t-that’s...”

It was as if her argument had returned like a boomerang and hit herself instead. Once she saw Kuroneko at a loss for words, Kirino gave a small smile, like the ones I've seen Kanako give before.

"Come on, *become* the character and say something. You saw how Aru-chan acts at that event recently, right?"

"I-I don't want to... why does someone like me have to... have to say such embarrassing things...?"

*Snap. Snap.*

As Kuroneko teared up, Kirino took out her cell phone camera and began to snap pictures.

"When did you take out that cell phone... w-why are you taking photos?"

"Well, it's a rare chance."

"P-Please stop..."

*Snap. Snap.*

"D-Didn't I tell you not to take pictures...? Are you not listening?"

"If I make a photo collection of you in that cosplay, I'm sure it'll be a huge hit at Comiket."

She wasn't listening at all. I found Kuroneko's reaction pretty cute, so even though I pitied her I didn't really feel like stopping Kirino. Kirino just continued to ecstatically snap photos of Kuroneko in her cosplay.

I guess after all was said and done, Kirino really liked Kuroneko.

"Ahh... I'm satisfied now."

Kirino wiped the sweat off her forehead, apparently finished with her task. On the other hand, having had her picture taken so many times, Kuroneko was now

huddled on the floor, hugging her knees. Her face was completely red. Being shy and a cosplayer at the same time... how exactly was that supposed to work?

“Hey, Kirino.”

“What?”

“How’s my cosplay? Don’t I look really cool? You can call me oniisama if you want.”

Cosplaying had made me fearless, so I asked a question I would never ask normally.

“Yeah yeah, whatever, it looks super good on you.”

But Kirino’s response was very apathetic.

“Hey, you’re not even looking, and you say that? Come on, take a proper look at me.”

Don’t just fuss over Kuroneko... praise me too!

“Ugh, geez... you’re like a typical noisy cosplayer... people who are plain-looking but still narcissists are just beyond saving.”

“.....”

You are the last person on Earth I want to hear calling me a narcissist.

“A-Anyways, what happened to Saori?”

“Eh? She was saying that she would start changing when I went out.”

“Hmm.”

“And remember, she was the one who suddenly told us we were going to cosplay... something feels funny.”

“Ahh.”

Certainly, Saori was acting a bit weird. But I had some idea of what she had been thinking behind that “smile” of hers.

When I saw “Kaori” in her sunglasses and survival gear, I realized it.

She... was probably quite a beauty.

She was always saying things like “my beauty” with so much confidence, but she was probably being serious.

So, I was certain that she smiled like that because she was going to try to surprise us with her real face... that must have been her plan.

Of course, I hadn’t forgotten how embarrassed she was to show us her real face.

But if she did it as a cosplay...?

In other words, there was some cosplay that would allow Saori to show her real face without feeling embarrassed, and she was going to come out in that cosplay. That was my guess, at least.

But if that’s the case, then it would be frustrating for me to take the bait and act surprised. Kirino and Kuroneko might be surprised, but I would be firm and wouldn’t waver. No matter what outfit Saori showed up in. Fufu, how disappointed she’s going to be.

“Ah, Saori, you’re here?”

I heard Kirino’s voice. Next I heard the door opening.

Alright... show me what you’ve got! Show me what you’ve got, Saori...! No matter what, I won’t give you the satisfaction of seeing me surprised!

-

“Sorry to keep everyone waiting.”



-

**"WHO THE HELL ARE YOU?!?"**

-

What the hell? Was this Saori? This girl was Saori? This refined-looking woman in a uniform was Saori?

Craaaaaap~! Not good, Saori... this was seriously not good... she was really beautiful. Insanely beautiful!

And at a glance, it wasn't even enough to call her a woman! She exuded the aura of a grandly elegant young lady! Amazing! Her hair was silky, and her breasts and behind looked like a supermodel's!

Who would have thought that just taking off your glasses could transform someone this much?! This wasn't an eroge. So no matter how much of an image change this was, when I thought about it I knew this was still definitely Saori. But this was seriously crazy. There wasn't a trace of her old self. Her voice was even different. This was seriously too crazy. Whatever else happens, you all should try and understand how crazy this was, seeing this incredibly beautiful lady suddenly appear in front of my eyes.

"... All things considered, aren't you a bit too surprised?"

My sister was shocked at my reaction.

... But come on. I was surprised half to death there...

I was expecting someone beautiful to appear, but I still thought that she would have the same ω face on when she showed up. T-To think that she would change so much...

"T-This isn't even a costume anymore... this is a complete metamorphosis..."

Kuroneko had also stiffened in shock, and stared at this transformed Saori.



Seeing our reactions, noblewoman-cosplay Saori put a hand up to her mouth and gave us a graceful chuckle.

“Watching you act so surprised makes me quite happy. It was worth revealing myself like this.”

And then she grabbed the hem of her skirt and gave us an old-fashioned curtsey.

“Kyoussuke-san, Kiririn-san, Kuroneko-san. My name is Makishima Saori. I am pleased to make your acquaintance.”

“That’s... your real name?”

“Yes.”

Saori tilted her head in a small nod. She performed that little action masterfully, and even though she was putting on an act for us, it seemed very natural. I really wouldn’t be surprised if this were her real form.

“Also, that’s the uniform from the school we saw on the way over here... right?”

“... That look... is that really a cosplay? Or is it...”

Kirino and Kuroneko both spoke with slightly trembling voices.

“Fufu.”

Saori just gave us a mysterious smile, but didn’t say another word. !!!

Kuroneko also didn’t press any further. However...

-

*“My name is Makishima Saori. I am pleased to make your acquaintance.”*

-

Saori’s feelings had been transmitted loud and clear. I’m sure to Kirino and Kuroneko as well.

Saori looked around at us in our costumes.

“Everyone, those costumes look splendid on you.”

“Not as great as yours though.”

“..... Thank you.”

T-This is so crazy... don’t smile at me like that... it’s just too much.

Saori showed us a small blush.

“But, this is a bit embarrassing.”

“... Hmph... it serves you right. You forced me to wear a maid outfit that one time, remember? I wonder if you understand now how I felt back then?”

“Fufu, but as I recall, you two were quite excited when you changed into those outfits...”

“Is that so? At any rate, even if it’s something I wanted to do, that doesn’t change the fact that embarrassing things are embarrassing.”

“Quite true.”

Haha, it seemed that my guess that she was going to cosplay in order to deal with the embarrassment that came with showing her real face was hugely mistaken. Instead, she was going to show us her real face, even though she was every bit as embarrassed about it as before, when she was covering her face with her hands. At least, that’s how I saw it.

“Dressing up like this and showing each other... it really is pretty embarrassing, isn’t it?”

“Really? I don’t feel embarrassed at all. I’m getting pretty excited though. Because unlike you, I’m super cute.”

“Ugh...”

Yeah yeah, Ms. Narcissist. After all, you don’t have an ounce of shame in that body of yours.

However, and I would never say this out loud, but I still thought my costume was the best.

I still thought that I was the coolest person in the room.

Nobody would agree with me, but this was definitely my victory. Hmph, serves you all right.

Right then, Saori said something that made me think she could read my mind.

“Kyouzuke-san’s Shikkoku cosplay looks just like the real thing too. That’s pretty great. I almost want to be taken prisoner by him.”

“Eh? I-Is that so? ... Ehehe.”

Crap, I’m getting really happy. Finally... finally someone complimented me!

“Kiririn-san’s Queen of Nightmare feels a lot different from the real character... but I think that makes her all the more charming.”

“Right? You understand, don’t you? Cosplay isn’t just about looking like the character!”

“Indeed. As expected from Kiririn-san. You’re quite quick to understand things.”

There were still some traces of the otaku version of Saori in her vocabulary.<sup>1</sup>

“And then, of course there’s Kuroneko-san...”

“W-What do you want? Don’t look at me too much please.”

Saori looked Kuroneko up and down, and Kuroneko blushed.

“..... A perverted but cute Aru-chan... what an incredible outfit.”

What was she, some pervy grandpa?

Kuroneko muttered in shock.

---

<sup>1</sup> Pretty sure this is a reference to her saying “Sayou desu,” which is a bit of a fancy way to say “Indeed.” She has done this quite a lot already.

“... You’re still the exact same person at the base of it, aren’t you?”

“Hmm, perhaps.”

Saori put a hand to her mouth and chuckled.

In my view... the fun of cosplay came from seeing yourself transform into someone different, like when I saw myself in the mirror back there and got all excited. And if that someone happened to be a character that you liked, it was even more fun.

Just like making doujin games and doujin manga, cosplaying in front of people and getting your photo taken was a form of self expression.

And that’s why, just like it had been in the club, instead of cosplaying alone...

“Everyone, let’s also take a photo together, alright?”

“Ah, yes, let’s.”

“Sure. I’ll be really nice today and let you take a photo for free even.”

“... Well, I guess there’s no reason for me to refuse.”

Instead of cosplaying alone, it was much more fun to do it with everyone together.

All of us cosplayed and enjoyed ourselves.

We were embarrassed now, and when we looked at these photos later I’m sure we would be embarrassed as well. And then, every time we brought this experience up in the future we would feel the same way. That’s what a shared memory was.

Cosplaying together... it really sounded like something only children did. And it was embarrassing.

That was probably a normal reaction. I didn’t intend on denying that.

But, when I did it for real...

I couldn't help but think that this didn't feel too bad.

This wasn't an experience you could get by just living conventionally.

"By the way, there's something I've been meaning to ask this entire time..."

After losing myself in thought, I heard Saori begin to speak.

"Hm? What is it?"

"Why exactly did you all come here to see me today...?"

"Ah, that's..."

Saori looked incredibly serious when she asked us that, so I found myself unable to lie.

I looked behind me, and saw Kirino and Kuroneko give me a collective nod... alright. I got it.

"Well, you were... umm... when you came to see us that one time, you really seemed kind of depressed..."

"And it's the first time we've seen you like that. So we were worried."

"Hmph, and you thought you could hide that from us. Did you think you could fool me?"

I started off, and both Kirino and Kuroneko used that as an opportunity to join in and speak out as well.

"Could it be... you were worried about me? And that's why you came all the way here...?"

"Don't look so confused. If you see a friend looking depressed, it's natural to be worried. When Kirino was gone and I was feeling down, didn't you also come all the way to my place to cheer me up?"

"Huh, so you were feeling down when I left?"

Ugh, I'm an idiot! I forgot Kirino was right there!

"Shut up! We're having an important conversation right now, so don't butt in!"

Look, she's smiling! She's making fun of me!

"A-Anyways... so it's tit for tat! You're helped us out so much already... but I mean, even if you didn't it would be the same! When you're depressed everything feels so off! So let *us* do something for *you* every once in a while!"

"..... Kyouzuke-san."

Saori's almost transparent eyes watered as she looked at me, her hands clasped in front of her chest.

Seriously, seeing her do that... it was not good! My opinion of this girl was... it was...

My affection meter for her was already filled past bursting before today, but now...

"Ow!"

My sister pulled on my ear. And then behind me, Kuroneko kicked me in the shins.

"W-What the hell are you two doing?!"

"Don't act so lovey-dovey like that! It's gross! It's gross gross gross gross gross!!"

"Getting that strange look in your eyes just because Saori's real face was not what you expected... what a dirty, dirty male."

What the hell were they getting all pissed over...?

"Fufu.... Fufufu..."

Saori held her stomach and burst out laughing.

"Aha, ahahaha-"

"W-What is it?"

“N-Nothing... I really never expected for today to turn out this way, with me exposing myself like this to everyone.”

Saori said something that reminded me of the time when Kuroneko told me her real name.

“Yeah, that’s true.”

Now that she mentioned it, it’s been over a year since I’ve known her, but I still didn’t know much about her. We met on the internet, we always used screen names when referring to each other, and this was the absolute first time I’ve seen her with her glasses off.

Her home was also pretty far away, so it’s not like she was attending the same school as me like Kuroneko was.

If we hadn’t come today like this, it’s possible that we would never again have had an opportunity to learn Saori’s real name and see her real face. When I thought about it like that, I did realize that Saori might not have wanted this, but...

“I’m happy. That I learned something about you today.”

“..... Yes. I’m also happy that you learned more about me.”

Saori nodded, and then looked at each of us in turn.

“Would you mind if I told you a bit more?”

### Chapter 3: Part 12

Saori told us more about her past.

“To be honest, I would be lying if I told you that all the goods in this mansion belong to me.”

“What do you mean?” I sent back the standard response.

“My older sister... and her friends. A lot of their things are also mixed in.”

“So you really do have an older sister. And that means...”

“Yes, the ‘character’ I was playing back there was based on my older sister, Makishima Kaori. She’s a strange, tomboyish girl who likes survival games and plastic models.”

So that personality and way of speaking were both based on a real person...

“My older sister and her friends would often play survival games, watch anime together, built plastic models... and they would often go to Akihabara for fun. They became quite serious about it, and were collecting model guns, figures, and other otaku goods.”

“I see. I’ve often heard about people who awaken to their otaku sides because of a sibling’s influence.”

This time it was Kuroneko who chimed in.

And I agreed. After all, I had started playing eroge because of my little sister.

Saori smiled, almost as if she had hit upon a fond memory.

“Yes... it was because she always played with me. We were really very close. Just like the four of us are now.”

“I see.”

“But that group has already broken up.”



“Why?”

Hey Kirino... is that really something you should be asking?

I had my doubts, but Saori just continued talking with a quiet smile.

“For various reasons.”

Saori sounded a bit lonely as she spoke.

“The biggest reason is that my older sister, who was the center of this group, married and moved overseas. Even what may seem like a strong group will easily fall apart once its most important person is taken away.”

Most important person taken away, huh...? I feel like I’ve heard that somewhere before.

Ah, it was something that she had said before. When Kirino had gone away.

“There was someone in the group who made a normal boyfriend at the school she was transferring to, and decided to get rid of all her doujinshi and plastic models... there was a person who graduated high school and went to college in Germany, where she decided to focus on her research and left all her beloved games and manga in Japan. There was a person who began hanging out in a different place because the survival game center she was familiar with got torn down. And then, I found myself suddenly alone. Completely alone, with only the many goods I had gotten from everybody and the fond memories remaining.”<sup>1</sup>

“Bang.” Saori made a gun with her fingers and shot it into empty space.

“So sometimes I feel that I have to play with them. Wondering if they feel lonely.”

So that’s why she put on that outfit and played survival games by herself.

... But the goods weren’t the things that were lonely, I think.

*“Friends are not meant to last forever.”*

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<sup>1</sup> I’m completely guessing on all the genders here. There’s no way to tell otherwise.

I see. When Kirino left without saying anything, Saori had gotten angry.

Kirino probably realized that as well. She looked pretty guilty.

“A part of me was just resigned to it. I really loved each and every one of them... but those people had been brought together by my older sister’s charm. Once my sister left, it might have been unavoidable that everything else would fall apart.”

Saori was choked up with tears. It was a voice I would never expect from someone who was usually so cheerful.

She looked up firmly and continued.

“And then... one day, I thought of something. Just like my older sister, I would form a group of friends and be that group’s center. If I did that, as long as I didn’t go away... as long as I was there to unite everyone and keep the community fun... my friends would always be with me. And then...”

“Then you made that SNS community... and met us?” Kuroneko spoke.

“Yes. I had to wring out every small bit of courage I had to do that, you know? For someone as shy as me to be a group leader... I really didn’t know if I could manage.”

*“Well, haha, I’m a bit embarrassed. Truth is, this was the first time I organized something like an offline meeting... so I wanted to make a good impression on everyone and did my best to make a character appropriate for a leader...”*

I seem to remember her saying something like that.

Putting on such a bizarre outfit like that and speaking so strangely... at the beginning, I really just didn’t know what to make of her.

But Saori, at that time... she might have been trying her very, very hardest.

So she put every ounce of her strength and enthusiasm into becoming a character like that...

What the hell. What the hell... I spoke while dealing with a flood of emotion.

“What an amazing idiot you are...”

“I was indeed an amazing idiot.”

Her eyes narrowed into crescents, and Saori scratched her cheeks shyly. That was an action I was used to seeing Saori taking... she might look different, but she was definitely our good friend Saori.

“But when we were at summer Comiket, you seemed pretty comfortable, and there were also a lot of people you knew... so you didn’t look like you were struggling at all.”

“Those were just connections I have because of my sister or because of my father’s work. The only relationships I have forged by myself are with that SNS community. If you felt I looked comfortable, it was just because my acting was pretty good.”

“... I see.”

Geez. Seriously, this girl was just...

“Did you think we would just leave you or something?”

“B-But, you *did* leave, didn’t you...?”

“Oooo...”

Kirino, you idiot. You shouldn’t have said that.

“I’ll be here for a while at least. And even if sometime later, I have to go away...”

Kirino spoke clearly.

“I won’t stop my hobby. And I won’t stop being your friend. You got a problem with that?”

“... I say this time and again, but I don’t have many friends..... Ku ku ku... don’t think that you can so easily escape from my ‘curse.’”

Kuroneko once again spoke her true feelings but in a twisted way.

“... So there. I don’t know what’s going to happen in the future, but for now, I don’t think there’s anything for you to worry about. I also like you quite a lot, and the college I plan to go to isn’t that far, so there’s no reason to think we won’t see each other anymore.”

And in the end, I also told her my feelings. After that...

“..... Alright.....!”

Saori smiled and wiped her tears away with a finger.

“H-Hey... don’t cry...”

“But, I’m so happy... I didn’t even plan this event, and it turned out so...”

Yeah, that’s true. Now that I thought about it, up until now, we’ve relied on Saori so much. Whenever we wanted to hang out, she was the one who always put the plan together. Seeing her so happy about that actually made me feel a bit guilty.

Kuroneko held a handkerchief out to Saori.

“Thanking us for something like that makes us feel kind of strange too. We’re only doing what we want to do.”

That was the phrase that Saori often repeated when she was trying so hard to help us out.

Kirino also suddenly let a teasing smile show on her face.

“Come on! We’ve come all the way here and we’re all cosplaying...”

-

“So we’re going to take a photo together, right?”

-

After that day, a new dark mark was scorched into my personal history.

Every time I looked at that photo, I would squirm in embarrassment and remember that day.

And I'm certain I would never forget that experience for the rest of my life.

**END CHAPTER 3**



### Chapter 4: Part 1

Ria Hagry was the twelve-year-old girl who was Kirino's roommate when she was overseas.

According to Kirino, she was the fastest elementary schooler in the world.

She was a superstar. My own little sister, who had excelled at the junior high prefectural track tournaments, said that she was no match for Ria.

She had vibrant, dark brown skin. And long, flexible legs. Her sleek black hair was tied behind her in a ponytail. She might have been small and sweet, but her talent and accomplishments were nothing to scoff at, and this "genius girl" had the media in a frenzy.

By the way, I didn't have too positive of an impression of the word "genius." I found out that a person I thought was a "genius" turned out to just be an extremely hard worker... granted, that was also an admirable skill. But I started to feel that it was incredibly rude to sum up all of that person's blood, sweat and tears with a single word like "genius."

Ah, yeah, she's just a genius, so of course I'm no match for her.

Those words amounted to nothing more than an excuse I fed myself to make myself feel better about my own laziness. For someone like me who hadn't put as much effort as she did, those were words I shouldn't throw around too much.

Although, if you want to talk about pure talent, Kirino definitely had that.

Her physique, her reflexes, her intelligence, her figure... they were all top-notch. It was rare, but there were some people in the world who were just born with unshakable, natural talents. From a certain angle, my sister was one of those people. If she wasn't, even if she tried ten times harder than everyone else on Earth, there was no way she could be so multitalented. To put it more simply, even her appearance itself was the result of brilliant talent. If you claimed that it was possible to look like that with just hard work, you'd end up pissing off all the other girls in the world.

Ah, I think I got a bit off topic there.

In other words, at least when it came to running, my little sister was not good enough to be considered a genius. So there's no reason to expect she could compete with Ria, whose legs overflowed with talent and who practiced at least as much as Kirino every day.

However, it seemed that Kirino had claimed victory over that invincible opponent just once.

Kirino had dropped out of the elite track and field program she had signed up for overseas, but the one person she had managed to get the best of was none other than Ria.

And how did Kirino defy all logic and beat an opponent who should have completely outclassed her?

That was something I still did not know.



1. *Journal of the American Medical Association*, 1997; 278: 1019-1024.

1. *Journal of the American Medical Association*, 2000; 283: 2689-2695.

1. *Journal of the American Medical Association*, 1997; 278: 1019-1024.

I had an insanely uncute little sister, so I guess I had a bit of a strange bias when it came to people who looked like younger girls.

I don't need a little sister. An older sister though... I would like one of those.

Well, sure. You might point out that almost all of the eroge I play are loli eroge.

But it's not like I was playing those games because I wanted to. If you really wanted to use that as a basis for calling me a lolicon, then my little sister was way more of a lolicon than I was.

Although, of course, it's much more appropriate to call Kirino a Siscon than a Lolicon.

But I don't think I'll go on and explain the subtle differences between lolicons and siscons.

This really wasn't the time for that.

Well, I guess that's about as much of an intro as I'll give... let's get to the serious issue at hand.

Indeed.

Why in the world did I suddenly start asserting that I wasn't a lolicon? Well...

-

Right now, there was an elementary schooler standing stark naked right in front of my eyes.

-

"....."

I couldn't help but stare.

There was a girl with glossy brown skin standing tall and proud in our house's entranceway.

No matter how you looked at it, she wasn't Japanese.

Perhaps she had just gotten out of the bath, but her black hair was still quite wet. Steam rose from her entire body. She had a bath towel in one hand, but she didn't seem to have any intention whatsoever of using that towel to cover her naked body.

She was sort of looking in the opposite direction, so she still had yet to notice my presence.

She wasn't very tall, but her legs were long, and the beautiful lines along her stretched back left quite an impression.

"... Wha-..."

Why is it that the minute I got home, I found myself providing commentary on a small girl's fully nude body...?

I just stood right in front of the front door, with my shoes still on and my mouth open, not being able to move from that spot.

"..... Wow, since when did erogé get so damn realistic...?"

Even for me, that was an insanely stupid thing to say.

But I really hope you sympathize with me here.

I mean, to explain a bit, I came home from school, opened the front door with an "I'm home!" and then was greeted with this. Alright, I don't think that explains much, but please just wait a little bit longer.

At my mumbling, the girl turned around.

"Ah..."

The girl's reddish-brown eyes looked at me and widened. I thought this was going to unfold in the standard way, with her screaming at me, but...

"Ehehe."

The completely naked little girl faced me and gave me an ear-to-ear smile.



### Chapter 4: Part 3

Well then. While my little sister is busy murdering me, shall I explain the details leading us into this situation?

I guess I ended up telling things out of order, but my little sister first brought up *this situation* on the night of the day we had seen Saori's "true form."

"Hey, dad. I heard from a friend who I was pretty close with in America that she's coming to Japan soon. Do you think we could let her do a homestay here?"

It was after dinner, and the entire family was gathered in one place.

My father nodded and spoke in a low voice.

"Homestay... so you mean, that friend would live in this house for a little while?"

"Yeah."

My father crossed his arms and fell into thought. "Sounds fine to me. Doesn't it, dear?" urged my mother. My mother was almost always on Kirino's side. Well, it didn't seem like my father really was planning on objecting to the plan anyways.

*"Sounds fine to me. Doesn't it, dear?"*

*My mother urged him. She was almost always on Kirino's side. Well, it didn't seem like my father really was planning on objecting to the plan anyways.*

"I see. Well, I don't mind as long as your friend's parents also are okay with it."

"Hooray! Thanks, dad!"

Kirino clasped her hands together and looked truly happy. She wasn't just putting on an act; in front of our father, she was pretty sincere with her emotions.

But to be honest, it's not like I didn't harbor any misgivings about this sudden plan of hers.

*"Friend who I was really close with..."* so it was one of the runners who Kirino was no match for, right? Wouldn't it be a bit frustrating to see one of those people again?

At the very least... I wouldn't want to meet anybody who had once gotten me depressed. That would just get me even more down.

"... What are you looking at? You got a problem, say it out loud."

Well, she herself was the one who suggested this, and from what I could see she seemed to be pretty excited about it, so maybe I was worrying too much. It wouldn't do anything if I raised a ruckus about it right now. So whatever happens will happen. Alright.

"No problems here. I was just thinking that it's nice that we're gonna have a cute girl staying here..."

Of course I couldn't say what I was really thinking, so I just said something that randomly popped into my head.

When I did that, Kirino looked at me like she was looking at garbage.

"If you touch her, I'm seriously going to kill you... you lolicon."

"... Lolicon? Hey, what the hell?"

Kirino didn't respond to me. My father ignored the fact that I had been called something disgraceful and asked his next question.

"Kirino. What kind of girl is this friend of yours?"

"Her name is Ria-chan. Look, she's this girl here."

Kirino took out a magazine she had probably prepared for this occasion and showed it to us. It seemed to be a track and field magazine.

Ahh, so *that's* why she had called me a lolicon.

I saw on the magazine page a name and face I recognized from a news report I had seen a while back.

The Fairy of Track and Field, Ria Hagry-chan (twelve years old), is what it said.

It was a picture of a girl in running shorts doing stretching exercises. She had vibrant-looking brown skin and a ponytail, as well as long, well-defined legs. If you imagined a well-raised thoroughbred as a little girl, this was probably how it would feel like.

“This girl... she was the one you won against once...?”

“Yes.”

Kirino answered my question curtly. After that, she faced the rest of the family and spoke cheerfully.

“She was my roommate from overseas. We were really close... ah, I guess...”

At that point, Kirino gave us a grin.

“I guess she was kind of like a little sister.”

I see, now I completely get it.

This girl... she wouldn't be sad at all if she could meet up again with her little sister.

... Hmm.

So someone Kirino thought of as a little sister was coming to this house.

Didn't this situation bring up quite a lot of ifs?

You know... *if* Kirino had a little sister, what would she be like? ... Something like that.

From another angle... *if* I had an even younger little sister, what would it be like? But honestly, just having one little sister was more than enough for me.

And so, “Kirino's little sister” would come to the Kousaka household.

I could only imagine what wild, strange things would happen.

### Chapter 4: Part 4

And so, a few days later...

“Get out!”

“H-Hey... this was completely out of my control...”

“Shut up and get out, hentai! Get out of this house!”

I had witnessed the sight of a completely naked “Kirino’s little sister,” and as a result was meeting this cruel fate.

What the hell... After Kirino had kicked me a bunch of times, she grabbed the naked Ria and escaped swiftly back to the changing room, after which they immediately changed and came back to the entranceway. And what’s more...

“Get out and never come back again!”

She started pushing me with tears in her eyes.

By the way, through all of this I still remained standing in the entrance way, with my shoes still on.

“Wait! Wait just a second, Kirino...”

I had no idea what was going on. Why was it that I had just come home, only to be banished from that very home forever?

You probably could guess from my description of what had happened, but it’s not like I had any ill intentions here. The ones at fault here were Kirino for not tying her towel around her properly, and that brat who came out of the changing room stark naked... Ria was her name, right?

“I mean, you’re always always-“

Only half-listening to my little sister’s rant, I glanced at the hallway.

There I saw that the brown-skinned girl, Ria, was poking just her youthful face out of the changing room, and was watching our little sibling argument.



“.....” *Stare.*

She was drying her hair with a hairdryer and watching us with eyes that were filled with wonder.

I was a bit surprised, but her eyes were purely innocent, and weren't filled with any apprehensions or ill will towards me at all. At the very least, that's what I thought.

She seemed to still be in the middle of changing, which is why I could occasionally see her exposed collarbone.

Geez, all this after we had had the worst first meeting in the world...

Did this brat not have a sense of shame? She might be an elementary schooler, but she was also a girl, so she should have already developed those kinds of feelings.

“Hey, you lolicon! When I'm talking to you be sure you're looking at me-... huh?!”

Kirino realized where I was looking and turned around, finally seeing Ria there.

“R-Ria! How long do you plan to stay like that?!”

“Ahah, Kirino is scaaaary~~.”

“Shut up! Hurry up and change!”

My little sister scolded Ria with a looooot of anger in her voice.

And with Kirino now angry at her, Ria let out a “Ugyah!” and pulled her head back into the changing room.

Hm? What was all that just now?

There are probably plenty of people who feel the same way I do right now.

I mean, come on.

*“ We were really close... ah, I guess... I guess she was kind of like a little sister.”*

Kirino had said that about Ria.

All I know is that my little sister was an insufferable siscon who was way too into little sister moe, so I had imagined that she would have doted on Ria like Ria was some little sister who had appeared in one of her eroge. But in reality, their relationship was completely different from that.

“Ahah, Kirino, why are you this angry~~?”

“Of course I’m angry! Ria, go back inside! Also, the only reason things are like this is because even though it’s still daytime, *you* said you were sweaty after running all the way here from the airport!”

“But Kirino, you’re the one who wanted to go into the bath together.”

“Y-Yes I was, b-but...!”

This was like... this was like watching a normal older and younger sister interact with each other.

I don’t think Kirino would act like this with her school friends either.

I was a bit curious about this, but my little sister had turned into an active volcano, so I didn’t dare ask.

I would ask about all this later. I turned towards my little sister and once again clasped my hands before me.

“I’m sorry Kirino... please forgive me.”

“... Huh? You’re still here? I thought I told you to get out? Can’t you just vanish from my sight?”

Hnnngg. Cut it out already.

She was being way unreasonable, and it was starting to get on my nerves.

“How many times have I apologized by now?! I also told you it was an accident already, right?! Do you think I’m seriously going to leave the house over every single one of your little absurd complaints?!”

“Wha-... h-how dare you... ‘absurd’... what does that mean?! H-Huh?! D-Do you not understand exactly what you’ve done to me here?!”

“Not even a bit. Honestly, it’s not like seeing you naked after all this time is a big deal. We’re brother and sister. You’re way too self-conscious about it.”

I spat that last bit out, and then...

“Ooo... hnnngngnggg...”

Kirino’s entire body trembled, and she seemed to be storing up energy for the oncoming huge explosion. It seemed that I had completely trampled on a sore point with that last statement of mine.

... Ahh, in a few seconds she was going to blow up, wasn’t she...?

This seemed to be the start of the first serious brother/sister argument Kirino and I would have since she came back from overseas.

And just like then, I honestly didn’t care. Just do whatever you want.

The person who ended up defusing this ready-to-blow situation was the person who had started all this in the first place.

I had thought Ria had been changing in the changing room, but at some point (I didn’t even hear her make a sound) she had found her way to standing right behind Kirino. She looked quite like a kid with her short skirt and running shirt. Her hair was also well tied up in the same ponytail I had seen in the magazine article.

She didn’t seem the least bit concerned that Kirino and I were now arguing because of her.

Ria reached out towards Kirino (who was now in freakout countdown mode), and right when I was wondering what she was doing...

“Hyah.”

She tugged up Kirino’s skirt strongly.

“Wha-... Σ (°Д° ;)” Kirino froze.

And a second later...

“Kyah!!”

Kirino shouted out and pushed her skirt back down.

She swung her body around.

And saw Ria standing there with a proud look on her face.

“A-A-Ahhhh...”

Kirino flushed red with anger and shame, and this time turned to glare at me.

“Did you see it?!”

“I-I didn’t see anything!”

I waved my hands in denial. But of course, Kirino didn’t believe me.

“Liar! You definitely saw it!”

... W-Why did I have to have this conversation with my little sister? Just cut it out already. Seriously, it got annoying for me too if you kept on showing me things I really didn’t want to see.

I prepared myself for the series of punches I was sure Kirino would start to throw, but Ria butted in from behind Kirino.

“Kirino’s panties are pretty springy, aren’t they? Dontcha feel the breeze in those?”



“Y-You damn brat!”

Kirino blew up. Turning around, she let her fist fly. Her attack ripped unforgivingly through the air.

It was, in fact, as unforgiving as the serious punches she threw at me.

“Hah, not even close!”

But Ria squatted down and easily dodged Kirino’s fist (which had turned into a right hook).

And then...

“Hyah!”

*Flip flip flip.* From that crouch, Ria performed a sequence of backward rolls.

It was an acrobatic yet pointless move, and made me feel like I was watching some tokusatsu<sup>1</sup> flick.

I had no idea why, but she really didn’t make a single sound. It was almost as if she was weightless.

“And now the landing!”

*Plop.* With the grace of a gymnast, Ria landed on the ground.

“You little...!”

Kirino went on the offensive again. With a great deal of speed, she made a tackle right for Ria.

“Uhaah-“

It seemed that even Ria couldn’t do anything about this, and ended up pushed to the ground by Kirino.

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<sup>1</sup> A genre of Japanese film/TV that involves costumed superheroes with lots of special effects. Think Power Rangers.

I honestly didn't care a single speck, but from my position I had a full view of Kirino's underwear. She had been so angry about that before too... this girl really needed to guard herself better.

"I caught you...! Ria, just cut it out already...!"

"Uhhahaha! Wha-, Kirino, d-don't tickle me under my a-arms!!"

"Then think a bit more about your actions! Was there a point to doing all that stuff just to tease me back there?!"

"B-B-But Kirino got all angry because of me! Ugah!! You s-started that stupid fight with oniich-ahaha! O-Okay, I give! I give!"

Ria squirmed around as she was tickled all over by Kirino.

It almost looked like Kirino was getting revenge for that time Kuroneko had tickled her.

But, I see.

Ria had flipped up Kirino's skirt to redirect Kirino's anger towards herself.

So it looked like this brat did think things through sometimes. Because of her (well, I guess it had been her fault in the first place though), Kirino didn't really seem all too angry at me anymore.

I guess I should be grateful that what happened hadn't turned into a serious sibling fight.

"F-Fine, whatever. Ugh... every time I get angry at you, it always turns into something ridiculous..."

Kirino stopped tickling Ria and spoke in an exasperated voice. You know, that's something I've always wanted to say to her...

Ria, finally released from that torturous hell, breathed a sigh of relief.

"Fwaahh, thank God that stopped..."

Ria hopped up, rubbing the tears from her brown eyes.

“Ria, there’s a hentai lolicon here, so we’re going out until mom gets back. I’ll introduce you to my friends at school.”

“Okay.”

Okay my ass. Romping around naked and then treating other people like lolicons... did these brats mothers not teach them any manners?

Although I thought Kirino had calmed down, it seemed she was still angry.

She was acting even harsher and colder than she usually did.

“Kirino, Ria wants to go to Tokyo Tower!”

“Yeah yeah, we’ll get there. Also, you’re way too energetic for just having gotten here today. Are you sure you’re okay with the jetlag?”

“What’s ‘jetlag’?”

This brat really had too much energy.

Hadn’t they just gotten here from the airport?

“Okay, let’s get ready in my room then.”

“But Ria is already ready...”

“Huh? How are you ready? Look at your hair... we need to tie it again while it’s actually dry! Ugh, this is why you’re so.... Whatever! Just bring the tools and meet me upstairs!”

“Okaaay... geez, this is so annoying...”

It was the sight of a noisy older sister, and a younger sister who was sometimes annoyed by but nevertheless adored her sibling.

They really seemed like... just two normal sisters who got along with each other.

“Also, that lolicon over there! You get out of the house fast, okay?!”



Kirino paid me a single glare and went up the stairs.

In other words, only Ria and I were left in the entranceway. Because of all that had happened, I was still wearing my shoes.

... Alright, I really tried to strike up a conversation here, but...

It was kind of awkward. I mean, I had seen this girl naked just a minute ago... what should I do?

But as I hesitated...

“Ehehe.”

Ria looked at me and gave me a smile.

“Umm, I guess a lot of stuff happened and I didn’t get a chance to introduce myself... but umm... my name is Ria!<sup>2</sup> I guess I’ll be staying here for a little while!”

She was a pretty shameless little kid. Well, okay, there was also the possibility that she just didn’t understand Japanese very well, so I couldn’t take everything she said at face value. I should probably cut her a bit of slack in that respect.

“... I’m Kousaka Kyouzuke. Sorry about that back there.”

“Eheh, it’s fine, it’s fine. No problem. If you want, I can show you again.”

“I’ll pass!”

Was she some kind of exhibitionist?!

And thus, my first meeting with Ria started from a huge chaotic mess.

Things had started by her showing me her naked body, but for some reason it didn’t seem like she hated me after that... rather, it almost seemed like she grew a bit attached to me.

Although, that might just be my misunderstanding.

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<sup>2</sup> She says this in English. Or I guess I should say, she says this in “English.”

In any case... she was a wild, cheerful child. Our first meeting was enough for me to figure that out.

... I could feel the mental image I had first had of Ria crumbling into dust.

Rather than a brilliant track star making huge waves in the media, she just seemed like an energetic kid you could find anywhere.

After all, she was strangely friendly and informal with other people.

Ah, okay. I guess you could say if you took Rock and turned him into a pretty girl, he would be like this.

Ugh, that was a terrible analogy even for me.

**"Look at me, An-chan! I'm a pretty girl now!"**

Ugh, just imagining it made me nauseous.

I pressed a hand to my head while Ria looked at me through eyes sparkling with interest.

"Umm... you're 'Kirino's oniichan,' right?"

"Ah, yeah."

This girl's Japanese was pretty good but it was really awkward sometimes. I wonder who she learned the language from...

First Bridget, now this girl... all the kids around me were so good when it came to learning languages, weren't they?

Ria put her index finger up against her lips.

"Hm I see. HmMMM." She gave me a smile for some reason.

"... What is it?"

"Hm? You know, I've always wanted to meet 'Kirino's oniichan.' Can I call you 'Kyouusuke-Oniichan'?"

“Do whatever you want. Wait, what? You wanted to meet *me*?”

“Yeah! I’ve always thought, ‘He must be a reaaaally great person’!”

“Huh. Well, sorry to disappoint you then.”

“No, you’re just like what I imagined!”

Ria shook her head vigorously. I quickly turned around and faced the other direction.

“I see. Well, that’s nice then.”

“Ahh, you don’t believe me, do you? ... Ria’s not lying, you know.”

“Yeah yeah.”

I just brushed her comment aside, but inside I really was very moved. This was the first time in my life I’ve been directly given such praise by a girl...

It was also probably because I could feel that Ria was speaking from her heart.

And what was more, this girl suddenly hugged me.

“Oniichan, I super love you!”

“Uwahh!”

H-How the hell did things suddenly get to this?!

“See? Ria wasn’t lying!”

“I-It’s not like I was doubting you! H-Hey, stop that!”

“Eh? Whyyy~~? It’s fine, it’s fine.”

“If Kirino comes downstairs, things are going to go to hell again!”

I peeled Ria off me in a grand panic.

Geez. This brat was like one of those eroge little sister characters.

Or maybe all foreigners were this outrageously emotional? I really couldn't decide how someone with Japanese sensibilities could deal with stuff like this...

Also, by "super love," did she mean she likes me or loves me? I really didn't know.

... And what was going on right now...?

When I looked at this girl, I suddenly... I dunno, there was a tingling or something inside my chest...

What exactly was this feeling...?

D-Don't tell me, maybe I'm-

"Nice to meet you, Kyouzuke-oniichan! Let's get along from now on!"

... Maybe my inner lolicon had finally awakened?

As I listened to Ria speak words I had often heard in eroges, I began to feel a tinge of unease at what was happening within my mind.

### Chapter 4: Part 5

That night, we had a low-key welcome party for Ria.

Our house's new resident seemed to really enjoy the food, which my mother had gone out of her way to make nice for this special occasion. "This is really yummy, really yummy!" she kept saying as she used her fork to stuff her cheeks.

"Oh, this just reminds me of Kirino when she was young!" said my mother as she smiled in return, reminiscing. Also, it was pretty funny to see my father there, since he was really bad when it came to foreigners and was clearly nervous. I knew that he had been practicing English ever since it was decided Ria would be coming, so it was priceless to see his face when he met Ria and she greeted him with a "Yo pops!" in fluid Japanese. I seriously had a hard time keeping in my laughs.

Also, it seemed that Ria had learned Japanese from Kirino.

"But really, Ria could speak a bit of Japanese from the beginning anyways."

"Yeah, but if you don't practice speaking with *natives* you can't really ever get good! Since I got to become Kirino's roommate my Japanese has gotten way way better!"

"Is that so? Well, that's good to hear then."

I see. So Ria's Japanese sounded like a teenage girl sometimes because she had learned some of it from Kirino.

"Kirino's also gotten reaaally good at English!"

"I guess. Ria and I learned from each other, you could say."

Oh? So... did that mean that Kirino's English was just as good as Ria's Japanese?

If that were the case... well, I'd be pretty impressed. Kirino had just been overseas for a few months, and I thought she had gotten frustrated and come back home, but it seemed that she had gotten the time somewhere to get good at English too.

She might be pretty disappointed that she couldn't reach her original goal, but if you asked me, learning English made the trip worth it.

But she'd probably just get pissed if I told her that, so I'll keep it to myself.

After the welcome party...

I got into the bathtub and began reminiscing on what had happened today.

"But seriously... Kirino really seemed like a pretty good older sister back there."

Just thinking about it put a resigned smile on my face. I completely acknowledged how much she loved younger girls, but I never would have guessed that love could manifest itself like that.

Kirino didn't love Ria as some moe target for her affection, but loved her as a real little sister.

She introduced Ria to her friends, took her out training together, watched TV with her, occasionally scolded her... she was the spitting image of a mature girl who exhausted every (sometimes annoying) effort to take care of a junior.

And Ria also seemed to show lots of affection towards Kirino in return.

What's more, she didn't seem to find any problem playing pretty mean little pranks on Kirino.

The little skirt flip from before was actually one of the tamer things she's done... hell, there was a time when she brought Kirino's bras and panties to show me. And when she found out, Kirino didn't waste any time in smacking Ria.

Was it because of Ria's influence that Kirino's been so aggressive towards Kuroneko ever since she's gotten back from Japan? There wasn't another reason for that, right?

"Well, in any case..."

Kirino and Ria's relationship seemed very healthy, unlike the little-sister-moe stuff I'd expect from this sister of mine.

Granted, Kirino often said that you shouldn't mix two and three dimensions.

So this is what she meant.

"... If we had another little sister, I'm sure it would look something like this."

I muttered, the back of my head resting against the bathtub rim.

Kirino had probably been able to survive for three months in a foreign country away from her friends and family precisely because of this "little sister," her light in an otherwise bottomless pit.

On the other hand, that same little sister had beaten her black and blue every day, making her want to throw her entire collection away.

Ria Hagry. To Kirino, she was...

A super cute little sister who she spent every day at club with. A person who supported her weary heart in a lonely foreign country.

A seemingly unbeatable rival out on the track.

And the origin of an inferiority complex when Kirino saw how different their skill levels were.

"... I feel like I've heard this story somewhere before..."

I wonder how Kirino had felt about all this. She had gone through the experience of having a little sister who was much better than she was. Just like a certain someone.

If that were the case, how could she stand taking care of Ria with so much care and adoration like that?

In the same situation, weaker people would probably not even want to see their little sister's face.

"... I have to give her credit for that."

My little sister was doing something that I couldn't ever do. Doing it properly, and without any complaints.

She was proud of Ria. Hell, she was also proud of Ria's pride.

... How in the world did my little sister come to like little sister erogé?

Suddenly, that question popped up in my head. I had no idea how my previous train of thought led me to it. It's almost as if soaking in the tub didn't just turn my muscles to mush, but my mind too. Well, it's not like I'm thinking about something super serious anyways. So whatever.

I took the hand towel resting on my forehead and wiped my face with it.

"Hmm."

Speaking of erogé, a cute girl from overseas had come to our house... it was a situation that you could find in lots of erogé. And if we were in one of those games, at this point we would have probably already activated some H event with both of us in the tub.

For example, Kirino and Ria could suddenly open the bathroom door, wearing some revealing swimsuits or something...

*Rattle rattle rattlerattle, clang!*

-

"Oniichan! Let's take a bath together!"

-

"Kyaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaahhhh!!!"

I hid my chest with my hands and shrieked, like some innocent maiden getting molested.

And then, I sunk deep beneath the water in the bathtub.

"Hwah? What are you sinking underwater for?"



I rose back up with my back to Ria, gasping for air.

“S-Shut up! T-Take a bath together?! And you’re completely naked aren’t you?! I might have just been having a daydream about this but my daydream wasn’t this bad! At least wrap a towel around yourself! Or a swimsuit! What about a swimsuit!?”

Not good. I was so surprised that I said something which sounded like I was asking an elementary schooler to put on a swimsuit for me! That’s definitely not what I meant, okay?!

“Hm? Swimsuit?”

She seemed to not understand what I was saying.

“Like I said, cover yourself out while my back is still facing you! You’re way worse than erogē!”

“Eroge?”

Didn’t she know?! Elementary schoolers who went around so proudly naked like this would never get past the software censors this day and age!

“Just get out! Why in the world are you so hell bent on showing me your naked body?!”

“Because, I super love Kyouusuke-oniichan!”

“At least wait three years and then come back!”

Of course, after that Kirino came running in, and my misgivings about my inner lolicon became even more severe.

### Chapter 4: Part 6

After I got out of the tub, I found myself groaning in my room.

“What the hell...? What the hell is up with that brat...?”

Nobody could really blame me for my confusion here.

N-Normal people should not be that friendly with people from the get go!

Today was the first day we met, wasn't it?! Why the hell did we start with her affection meter for me maxed out?!

This was like the complete opposite of how when Kuroneko first met Manami, she hated her.

Although, I'm pretty sure that was because Kirino had said lots of bad things about Manami to Kuroneko...

Hmm... maybe I was just a really cool guy? Maybe she had fallen in love with me at first sight?

I thought sweet-sounding thoughts like this, but if that were true it'd be impossible to explain the fact that I've never been very popular at school. Maybe my face just appealed to foreigners more...?

..... Nah, that's definitely not it.

So what the hell? Why was Ria suddenly so attached to me?

Thinking about this myself wasn't ever going to get me anywhere, so I decided to phone someone. I didn't want to ask for advice or anything... I just wanted to talk to someone and try to get a hint about how to think about all of this.

For example... ah, right.

Maybe I should call that guy who, to me, felt a bit like Ria, and who also has barged in on me while I was in the tub

I picked up the cell phone that was lying by my pillow.

*Ringgg... ringgg... ringg... click.*

**"Welcome! This is the Tamura Shop!"**

"What time do you think it is, you idiot? I also called your cell, so cut it out with the business talk."

**"Oh! Such a sharp, biting retort... this could be none other than An-chan!"**

I had called my childhood friend's little brother, Rock.

Rock wasn't this guy's real name though... it was the name of his "soul" or whatever.

**"What happened, An-chan? It's been so so long since we talked!"**

"Are you a moron? I was over at your place just the other day."

**"Huh, were you? Hehe, it just feels like we haven't met in over a year..."**

What was he talking about? Stop playing dumb, idiot.

Well, whatever. This overly-intimate personality of his was what I was counting on anyways.

"I just wanted to ask, but why exactly are we friends?"

**"We just started talking and that's what you say?! Isn't that a bit harsh?!"**

"No that's not what I mean... I was just wondering what happened in the beginning that got us to be friends."

**"Ah..... that's what you want to know? Hmm... well... when we were in elementary school, An-chan saved my life, so I guess that's how we got to be friends?"**

"Saved your lives? I don't remember ever doing something that impressive."

**"Hehe, don't tell me you've forgotten, An-chan! That time I couldn't hold it in and went in my pants, An-chan was the one who tried so hard to help me hide it!"**

"*THAT* was what you meant?! That's like the worst memory I have from elementary school! Thanks a lot for reminding me, ugh!"

**"Indeed, it was right then when I vowed I would follow An-chan to the end of time! Someday I'll repay the huge debt I have from then!"**

"I don't need any repayment, and stop following me dammit!"

*Click.* I hung up the phone and sighed deeply.

"..... Ugh, please someone make me forget..."

I see, I see. Something like that had happened...

So there was definitely a reason for Rock to have gotten so attached to me.

We also had known each other for a long time at that point, so it was no surprise we had gotten friendly with each other.

It was natural for me to help him out of a predicament like that.

But Ria was different. We had only met today, but she was just as attached to me as Rock was... at least, that's what it seemed like.

What in the world was happening here?

I didn't understand no matter how much I thought about it.

### Chapter 4: Part 7

The next day, I went to Akihabara together with Kirino and our “new little sister” Ria.

There was not a cloud in the sky on this sunny day. The summer sunlight gleamed and warmed our exposed arms.

It was already July. Time sure did fly.

A year and a month ago, when I had first set foot in this place... the sky had looked pretty similar.

Back then, everything outside the train station had seemed so strange and new to me, but now all these sights had become familiar ones.

But the people in the buildings had changed, the characters on the big ads had switched, and the station’s remodeling had finished.

The town itself had changed, together with the seasons and with the current trends.

This was the place they called Akihabara.

Every time I saw something that had changed from the Akihabara burned into my memory from a year ago, I felt a tinge of sadness... maybe I was beginning to develop some kind of attachment to this place?

Anyways, what were we doing here, you ask? That was simple – Kirino had made a declaration that she wanted to show Ria around the famous sights of Japan since Ria had come from so far away.

But my father had said “I don’t want a junior high schooler going out alone with an elementary schooler,” and so I found myself unceremoniously appointed as their chaperone. I was an adult, I guess... after all, I could even buy 18+ goods if I wanted to.

.....*Sigh.*

Honestly, I didn't really want to be here. I should've been studying for my college exams.

Why in the world did I have to come sightseeing with my arrogant "older little sister," and this annoying "younger little sister" who just clung to me like flypaper no matter where I went?

But I guess this was better than letting them go by themselves, so I reluctantly took on this task.

"Hey, Kirino. If you wanted to show Ria famous places, why in the world did you come to Akihabara first? There are a lot of other places. She wanted to go to Tokyo Tower first, didn't she? You could have taken her there, or maybe the Ueno Zoo, or if not maybe even Shibuya or something. You liked Shibuya, didn't you?"

"Huh? If you want to talk about Japan sightseeing, it has to start from Akiba, right? The other stuff can wait for later!"

"Uhh... well, that's..."

That's just your own biased opinion, isn't it? I was about to scold her with that, but...

"Ohhh, this is the famous Akiba? I really wanted to see this place just once..."

Ria seemed to be more than happy with coming here. She put one hand above her head like a visor and eagerly looked around, like some country bumpkin visiting Tokyo for the first time. During all this, she jumped from place to place... this girl seriously couldn't sit still for a moment, could she?

On the train earlier she had also seemed really restless, complaining about how she didn't like riding things and just wanted to run everywhere.

Well, it's not like she could run faster than a train... but I guess it goes to show how much confidence she had in her own legs.

"..... I'm surprised. She seems to be pretty happy about this."

“Seeee? It’s just like I said. Akiba is really famous overseas too.”

“I-Is that so...?”

Sure, there were a lot of foreigners here, but I thought they were all like those relatives of Bridget-chan I had met before. And this was just something Kirino was claiming, so it wasn’t like I could swallow it without question.

“But... I mean, I get that foreigners really like this place, but what exactly is the point of bringing an innocent little kid like Ria to a sketchy place like this? You going to go buy eroge with her or something?”

“Umm... you... don’t tell me you think they only sell eroge in this place?”

“Even if I did, that’s completely your fault, isn’t it?”

Hmph, I know. They sell quite a lot of other things here.

Like love dolls, or SM goods, or adult DVDs...

Cut me some slack... I knew that much.

“I have no idea what you’re imagining right now, but that’s not what I’m trying to say. I’m talking about just normal figures, or gashapon, or manga... stuff like that.”

Kirino spoke as if she had just read my mind. Also, stop it with that disgusted look you’re giving me, dammit.

But I also surprised myself.

When I tried to think of things they sold in Akiba that weren’t eroge, all I could think of were dirty things.

When exactly had my head gotten this perverted?

I blame everything on the Akagi siblings.

Meanwhile...

As Kirino and I were talking, Ria was running around the Radio Kaikan like pinwheel fireworks, and called to us with glee in her voice.

“Kirino! Kyouzuke-oniichan! Look! There’s someone in a weird costume over here!”

Ria had run up to a girl in a maid outfit handing out flyers.

“Hey Ria! Stop it, ugh!”

Without a moment’s delay, Kirino ran up to Ria and grabbed her by the ponytail.

“Uwah?! O-Owowow! H-Hey, Kirino! My hair! P-Pulling my hair isn’t fair!”

“If I don’t do this you’ll just dodge me! Think a bit more before you act, you damn brat!”

Kirino handled Ria’s ponytail like she would a horse’s reins.

“Umm... sorry about being a bother while you’re working.”

Kirino apologized to the maid in Ria’s place.

“This... this idiot girl was being so rude!”

“Ugyah?!”

“N-No... I-It’s fine... No problem.”

The maid seemed completely taken aback at this harsh way of disciplining Ria.

I figured this out after living with these girls for a few days, but these two generally behaved like this. Rather than saying Kirino was like an older sister who took care of her sibling, it would be better to say she was a young mother who was bringing her idiot daughter around with her.

Seeing the two of them return, I broke the silence.

“So, Kirino, where are we starting?”

“Hmm, I want to go check the anime blu-rays. I promised Ria after all.”



“So, we’ll start with Animate and then head for Toranoana?”<sup>1</sup>

“Yeah, let’s do that.”

I’ve been to Akiba with my sister together way too often, so we already had a kind of standard course that we took.

You could say we’ve gotten pretty used to making these arrangements. To me, it was similar to the times I would plan to hang out with Manami.

Because of Kirino, my inner otaku was growing larger and larger... it really might already be too late to save me.

Ria watched our little exchange, and gave us a happy grin.

“You two sure are close!”

“S-Shut up.”

“A-Agh?! M-My hair again! Is this abuse?! This is child abuse isn’t it?!”

“It’s because you said something gross...”

Just like always, it seemed Kirino didn’t like it when people thought we got along. Manami had said that we would definitely become close one day, but would that day really ever come?

Nah... that wasn’t right. I knew.

Compared to before, the distance between us had definitely shrunk.

I mean, nowadays it was common for us to go out and ride a train together, and then talk about where we wanted to visit...

“Well, let’s go from the Radio Kaikan then!”

Kirino pointed to the building in front of us, a hint of irritation still in her voice.

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<sup>1</sup> Anime goods and manga/novel/doujin shop, respectively.

“Hey hey, I thought we were going to Animate first.”

“Nah, I changed my mind! Come on, hurry up!”

“Ugh... okay, okay.”

Reluctantly, I chased after Her Highness. At that point, Ria slowly came up to me, rubbing her ponytail and with tears in her eyes.

“Hey, Kyouzuke-oniichan... isn’t Kirino a bit unfair sometimes?”

“... You must’ve had it hard over there in America too.”

Whoa... to think there was someone who shared my troubles in this world!

I had thought of Ria as some incomprehensible little perv before, but suddenly I felt a sense of companionship with her welling up within me.

Mmm... little sisters were nice, weren’t they?

### Chapter 4: Part 8

If I were to explain it to the uninitiated, the Radio Kaikan was a shopping center in front of Akiba Station.

There was a big yellow sign in front of it, with “The World’s Radio Kaikan Akihabara” painted on it.

The building was often called “Rajikan” by the locals. There were a lot of people who also thought of this place as the Mecca of electrical appliances.

Personally, I’ve always just thought of this place as a sketchy building filled with shops selling wireless appliances and devices.

And, like all the shops in Akihabara, the building was always packed, while the building itself had pretty much half-merged with the buildings next to it. The shopping district in Akiba was just supposed to be one section, but it had basically become a labyrinth. The shop entrances were always really flashy and had escalators, but when you went home you often had to use these lonely-looking emergency stairs... that’s the kind of place Akiba was.

I mean, on that note, I’ve personally gotten lost here countless times.

So...

“Huh? Where’s Ria?!”

“That brat is always wandering off by herself... so she got separated from us?!”

You know, I had a sneaking suspicion that something like this would happen...

Right now, we were talking near the Yellow Submarine hobby shop in the middle of Rajikan. Plastic figurines decorated the space all around us.

“Ugh, geez, that brat, when the hell did she get away from us?”

“Well, she probably slipped away when you were dashing towards those bishoujo figurines just a minute ago...”

“..... But there was a new Meruru figure there...”

Kirino looked a bit guilty as she gazed at the new Meruru figure decorating the inside of the glass case in front of her.

I spoke in an exasperated voice.

“..... Anyways, we have to look for her.”

“Yeah, we do. She’s probably pretty scared now that she can’t find us.”

“She’s that kind of person? I would expect her to be fine and just run all the way back home or something.”

“... You’re seriously an idiot, aren’t you?”

I winced a bit at my sister’s abusive words, which this time had a hint of something besides only scorn in them.

Without voicing her true feelings, Kirino spoke again in a slightly impatient tone.

“We have to go and find her quickly.”

“... Roger. Hey, Kirino, does she have a cell phone or something?”

“She doesn’t.”

Geez. She was even more technologically illiterate than Manami, wasn’t she?

“Well, should we split up? We can contact each other if one of us finds her first.”

“Got it. Even if you can’t find her, give me an update every five minutes.”

“Sure. Alright, I’ll see you later then.”

“Mm, okay. You better look properly for her! Don’t slack off!”

“Yeah yeah.”

I lifted a hand for goodbye and parted from Kirino. I took a quick trip around the entirety of the Rajikan, but I didn’t see Ria anywhere.

... Had she gone outside?

I went back for a moment to the station, but I couldn't see Ria anywhere over there either.

... Where in the world had she gone? That girl...

I happened to look up at the Rajikan building, when...

"Wha-..."

There she was. There she damn well was. She was waving down at me from the Rajikan rooftop!

"Kyouzuke-oniichaaaaan! Here! I'm here!"

"That damn brat...! She had no idea how much we were worried...!"

There was that saying that "Idiots and smoke love high places"<sup>1</sup>... but I had no idea it was so true!

In a panic, I rushed back inside the building.

I skipped the escalators entirely and dashed up the stairs.

*Pant..... pant.....*

This was hard. By the time I got up to my destination, I was already completely out of breath.

But...

"She's not here! Where the hell did she disappear off to?!"

I ran to the edge of the roof and tried to look for her from this vantage point.

And then...

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<sup>1</sup> Baka to kemuri ha takai tokoro ga suki. The intent is saying that idiots like to stand out (and therefore high places).

“Yoohoo~~~!!”

I once again heard Ria’s voice.

Following that voice, I found her... right below me, in front of the Radio Kaikan.

“That’s impossible... can that girl teleport or something?”

But that brat was down there, just like I had been a minute ago, staring up at the roof and waving happily. It was clear she had gone down by a different route... I had taken the shortest route up but I hadn’t passed her on the way, and she didn’t seem short of breath at all... what the hell. How much stamina did that girl have?

“Kyouzuke-oniichan, you’re so sloooooow~~!”

“You, stay there and don’t move!”

“Ahaha, nope nope nope! Come and find me!”

Ria stuck out her tongue at me and then once again ran inside the building.

T-That bastard... was she trying to turn this into a game of tag?

You might find it pitiful, but I really didn’t think I could catch her. She was like those metal slimes from Dragon Quest.

So really, I had no choice but to call in reinforcements.

I called Kirino and explained the situation to her.

**“... Got it. Okay, if you find her then call me first. You definitely won’t be able to catch her.”**

“... O-Okay.”

It was the truth, but hearing it out loud just seriously depressed me.

..... Hm?

“Hey, Kirino.”

**"Huh? Was there something else?"**

"Had something... like this happened in the past?"

**"..... Who knows."**

I heard a robotic *beep*, and the call cut out.

I had no idea what had even made me say those words.

"..... Well, whatever."

I shook my head to clear it. I had to look for Ria and let Kirino know.

This was kind of like this game of "cops and robbers" I used to play a lot when I was a kid.

But this was a bit different, in that the "robber" in this case was an elementary schooler who was way too fast for an elementary schooler, running like crazy around this place. Seriously, what an annoying opponent.

Kirino and I looked around the Radio Kaikan for ten minutes, with two of our agreed-upon status reports in between. I didn't really get a chance to rest the entire way, so I never really managed to catch my breath.

*Pant, pant, pant...* "I-I found her..."

I finally saw Ria inside a certain bookshop inside the building. This shop had quite a good selection of books, so when I came to Akiba with Kirino and Saori we would often visit here.

All the other customers were obvious otaku, so it was the easiest thing in the world to spot a brown-skinned elementary schooler in that crowd.

Ria was standing in a corner away from the gazes of the shop employees, and seemed to be looking for something on the shelves. The people who passed by her, though, seemed to take rather great notice of her.

... Was she seriously just picking out manga? She really didn't see how worried we were, did she?

Well, in this case I didn't think I needed to contact Kirino.

I'd sneak up behind her and then catch her right here and now!

But my plan soon crashed and burned. When I was around five meters behind her...

"Ah! Oniichan! You finally came~~."

It was like Ria had eyes on her back... she turned around and called out to me.

It didn't look like she was going to run away. She probably had already gotten tired of playing tag.

*Pant... pant...* "Don't disappear like that. Kirino was worried about you."

"Ah, really? Sorry!"

It was just like Kirino said. I felt my anger subsiding.

"... Seems like you're carefully looking for something, but did you find something you wanted? If it's just one or two books I can buy them for you."

"Really?"

"Yeah."

If I did that, maybe she'd behave a bit better.

Ria also seemed really happy, and held out one volume of manga to me. It was an A5-size manga with a drawing of a brown-skinned girl on the front.

"I thought this girl looks a bit like Ria!"

"Oh, yeah, you're right..."

..... Wait a minute.



T-This was...

Actually, this shop was...

-

Agh!

-

“Hey, Ria! That’s not a good book! Don’t open it!”

But I had realized just a little too late. Ria energetically opened the front cover...

“*Sniffle*... I-I thought the cover was pretty cute... but oniichan... this book is gross... oooo...”

“No kidding! That’s not something a kid like you should be reading!”

Ugyahhhhhhhh!! No wonder everyone else had been looking at Ria!

W-What the hell?!

Just listen to this, everyone!

Right now! Me! Here with this small girl who was about to cry!

We were in an ero manga shop!!

It was the worst possible situation I could imagine in the world. Even “sexual harassment senpai” didn’t cut it for me here! This already smelled something like a crime! If I didn’t run away right away, I was going to get reported!

“...*Sniffle*... Uuuuu...”

C-Crap! If she starts crying loudly right now... I’m seriously going to get arrested!

“I’m begging you, please don’t cry!”

“B-But... but...”

Ria looked like she was really on the verge of tears... I had to do something...!

Dammit, when I panic I get short of breath really quickly...!

Ugh... come on, me, remember. What do you do in times like these...?

I gently put my hand on top of Ria's head. And then, I started to stroke her hair.

"Nnn.... ahh..."

She half-closed her eyes and seemed to be enjoying herself.

"...*Sniffle*... oniichan, thank you..."

Ohh... this seemed to be working.

Thankfully, this girl seemed pretty attached to me, so I thought doing something like this would get her to stop crying.

It was something I had picked up in the past.

I might not be great at it, but I knew how to handle little girls.

I mean, here, if it's Ria, something like this should work...

*Pant... pant...* "C-Come on, let's go and buy you some candy, okay? Just come with oniichan."

"W-What the hell do you think you're doing?!"

*Bam!*

"Nwahh?!"

I was struck in the back with a violent jumping kick. My body arched backwards and fell flat on the floor.

It's probably a bit pathetic that I can tell from that... but...

That was Kirino's kick!

When I turned around, I saw my little sister there with her cheek spasming and with shock and murderous intent apparent on her face.

“Y-Y-Y-You... I-I never thought you were into that kind of thing...”

“N-Not! You’ve got it all wrong...! I was just... just trying to be reaaaaally nice and cheer Ria up here...”

“You were panting and making this small girl read ero books! Do you really think that explanation is going to fly here?!”

“Stop Kirino! Kyouzuke-oniichan didn’t do anything wrong!”

Almost as if she was finishing me off, Ria hugged me as I tried to get back on my feet.

“Oniichan, I super love you!”

That really didn’t make me happy, and her timing was the worst ever!

And of course, Kirino still looked beside herself with rage... and began to attack me with the usual label.

“You damn lolicon! You’re seriously gross! Go die!”

“I-I’m not a lolicon... dammit!”

I seriously wanted to cry. This kid might like me, but that seriously, seriously didn’t make me happy at all.

Please, someone, understand what I’m going through here!

### Chapter 4: Part 9

Ria ended up explaining the situation to Kirino personally, and in the end we managed to convince her to calm down.

Well... actually, it didn't seem like Kirino was a hundred percent convinced.

"..... *Stare.*"

See? She's looking at me way more coldly than she usually did.

"A-Anyways... let's go on to the next place. You wanted to check out the blurays at Animate, right? Right?"

"... Well, okay. I'll be sure to get to the bottom of this later, so prepare yourself."

"Prepare myself... what exactly are you planning to do to me?"

That's just terrifying.

"Responsibility! You're gonna take responsibility! Right, oniichan?!"

"You, seriously, be quiet! That's not funny at all! Where the hell did you learn that word?"

"That girl who looked like Ria in that manga back there was saying it!"

Stop imitating people from that manga, dammit!

As I suffered this psychological onslaught from my little sisters, we proceeded to Animate as planned.

Just a bit after we arrived, a commercial for the third season of Meruru began to show on the big screen.

"Ah!"

Kirino quickly ran up to the screen. Seeing her do that made her seem almost five years younger.

"This commercial is soooo cool! The art, the music... it's all so exciting!"

“Ohh, is this the one Kirino is always talking about?”

Ria looked up at the commercial and spoke.

“Yeah! It’s the one I promised I would show you if you ever went to Japan! You’ll definitely love it!”

“Ohh... I’ve never seen that before. Looks pretty great. Yeah, could definitely be fun.”

“When we get back let’s start watching it right away!”

“Okay.”

Haha... I really couldn’t tell which one of them was younger here.

Soon, the commercial ended.

“Ahh, that was greaaaat~~. I honestly think just being able to watch this show makes coming back to Japan worth it.”

In front of the Animate, Kirino gazed at the big screen, spellbound.

“They didn’t have Japanese anime over there in America?”

“I could’ve found a way to watch if I really wanted to. Like, I could have asked you to record the show and send the recording to me, or something like that. But, I mean, it just didn’t feel like the right place to do stuff like that.”

“And we didn’t have a TV in our dorm anyways.”

Ria followed up with her own comment.

They had gone to a place that was meant to train people in track and field, so it might have been lacking in the entertainment department.

I mean, Kirino had really worn herself out because of stress right? It was probably a harsh environment for an otaku.

Even someone who claimed to be a normal person like me would have found it hard to live without a TV (I mean, lately, just not being able to use the Internet was already pretty difficult on me).

“Ahaha, there really wasn’t anything to do in that place except for training, was there?”

But unlike Kirino, who looked completely unsatisfied, Ria didn’t seem like she had been starved for entertainment. She was a fun-loving, restless little kid, so had she really been alright over there?

“You didn’t even have a TV? Ria, wasn’t every day pretty boring for you then?”

“Eh, not at all! Ria spent every day doing things she really wanted to do, so it was super fun!”

Ria put both her hands behind her head and gave me an innocent, child-like smile.

I could intuitively tell that her words just now had come from the heart.

As long as she could run, she didn’t care if she didn’t have a TV, or any other entertainment.

She didn’t need anything else in this entire universe. That was her worldview, pure and simple.

... Ahh, this girl was just unbeatable.

That’s what I truly felt at that moment. A chill ran right up my spine.

Kirino shrugged her shoulders, like what she would do when she was about to butt heads with Kuroneko.

“It’s pointless trying to convince Ria. I swear, she’s probably the reincarnation of a remote-controlled racecar or something.”

“Wait, at least compare her to a thoroughbred or something. A toy model isn’t even alive...”

“But it’s completely true. She just runs all over the place until her batteries run out, and seriously doesn’t care about anything else.”

Kirino’s words were clearly sarcastic, but I could sense a little bit of admiration in them too.

I wondered if Ria was angry at what Kirino had said, but she eagerly nodded.

“Yup, I don’t really care about anything else.”

“See? I knew Ria would say something like that.”

Kirino let out a weak chuckle, a knowing look in her eyes.

Why was Kirino not nearly a match for Ria?

I think the little exchange just now was a very condensed answer to that question.

Kirino felt a remarkable amount of responsibility towards this girl whom she had once beaten, and with an iron will, she threw her every effort into practicing.

In the past, Kirino had balanced her modeling, her schoolwork, her hobbies, and her friends, holding each of those things dear...

Her way of life was something she could be proud of. I was really impressed by it.

But this meant she was taking a finite amount of power, time, and skill, and spreading it across several things.

There were those who took all their talents and time and focused it onto one single point.

And Kirino was no match for people who set running equal to their very lives.

If she really wanted to win against those people, she would have to throw away everything she had once held dear.

She had to battle them on a level playing field.

“.....”

I felt like now, I understood a bit what must have been going on in Kirino's head that led to her sending me that mail.

She was seriously an idiot. Everyone had things they were good at and things they weren't good at.

Going completely overboard wasn't going to do anything to change that.

And I mean, it's not like Ria felt like she was pushing herself to the limit or anything.

Sure, she threw away any other form of recreation and spent every day fiercely training without any complaints.

But to Ria, all of that was just a natural way to spend every day... it was something to laugh about and enjoy.

How did I know that, you ask?

Because, Kirino, you do the same thing.

Every day, you go to your modeling job, run track, study, play eroge...

You have such a hard schedule, but you think of it as a natural thing, and can laugh and enjoy it. This was the same thing.

*That certain thing* you felt about Ria was definitely the same as what I felt about you.

It was nothing more than longing for something you couldn't get.

Although, Kirino, you're a much more splendid human being than I am.

But... if you ever need someone's help to get over anything, I'll always be there to lend a hand.

As I looked at Kirino, I kept all those things I wanted to say under wraps. Then Kirino faced Ria and began to speak.

"Ria. You say that you don't care about anything other than running, but..."



“Hm?”

“That’s exactly why I brought you here. I want to show Ria the *things I like*. I can’t really put it in words too well, but this isn’t really for your sake... I just wanted to do this.”

“I see.”

Ria blushed a bit. And then she looked around.

This was Kirino’s beloved Akihabara.

A Meruru commercial was being broadcast on the Animate TV screen.

Cosplayers were striding along the road, live music was being played on stage during a special effects show, and there was a crowd over there in front of that shop, playing a demo version of a doujin game.

There was manga, anime, games, music, figures, wireless appliances, do-it-yourself models, arcades, maid cafés...

All of Japan’s subculture was alive inside this place.

It was also the birthplace of many fond sibling memories for us.

It was the place where we met new friends.

Right now, the place Kirino had wanted to come back to was right before Ria’s eyes.

And then...

For some reason, Ria looked right at me.

“I got it, Kirino.”

Ria nodded, seeming to have understood something, and then looked back to Kirino with a smile.

“I’m really having fun here, you know. Ehehe, Kirino is such a worrier.”

“Ugh... that’s not what I meant.”

“Sure, Ria doesn’t need anything else if Ria can run. But that doesn’t mean I’m sad when I get to do other things. Play with friends, or have fun, or things like that.”

“Hmph. Well, that’s good then.”

Kirino stubbornly turned the other way, but I could tell she was relieved.

Kirino probably thought that she was overstepping boundaries by pushing her own hobbies on her friend who was completely devoted to track.

But, I’m sure when Ria said “Kirino is such a worrier,” it was because she had sensed Kirino was thinking something like that.

And then...

She had mentioned she wasn’t sad when she could do other things, but that also meant that she didn’t mind if she didn’t have those things either.

She would live life to the fullest when the situation arose, but compared to running, having fun and friends took the backseat.

At least, that’s how I interpreted it. The fastest legs in the world... that was probably a title that had come from her incredibly special, tilted worldview.

... To be honest, I was a bit scared that Ria could just stand there and smile so innocently like that.

To think Kirino could beat someone like this... good job, Kirino.

But then, this brought up a lot of questions for me.

If running was this little girl’s life, then why would she leave Los Angeles, where she had the best training facilities in the world, and come all the way to spend time in Japan?

Maybe she just wanted to see a friend, or maybe she was interested in seeing Japan...?

But I felt all of those reasons probably fell pretty low on the priority list for Ria.

And I also still had no idea why she was so attached to me, and kept on telling me that she “super loved” me.

Was there really a theory that could explain all those things and yet not contradict Ria’s way of life?

“.....”

I wasn’t too sure... but I had a guess.

The real reason Ria had come to Japan was...

### Chapter 4: Part 10

"Allright, so should we have our match soon then?"

Ria said that in a vibrant voice, on our way home from all the sightseeing.

We were actually walking alongside Kirino's junior high when this happened.

It was evening. The days were long in the summer, but it was about the time when it would start getting dark.

"Match?" Kirino seemed confused.

"Yeah, match. A race."

Ria stopped and pointed towards the junior high schoolyard.

"Look look, there's a place over there where we can run. It's pretty much the same thing as a track."

"Hmph, are you a moron? I can't run in clothes like this."

Kirino seemed bewildered. Seeing t

"Aha, Kirino is playing dumb again~~."

"Huh? What do you mean?"

"Your shoes. And your shorts, and that shirt."

Ria started at Kirino's feet, and then worked her way up, pointing to each article of clothing in turn.

"You're wearing clothes that make it so easy to run, so don't give me that 'I can't run in clothes like this' excuse. Also, those shoes might not have spikes but those are definitely the same shoes you always used during practice, aren't they? Kirino is always so fashionable, so it's super strange she would go out with shoes like that."

"....."

In the face of Ria's questioning, Kirino just stood there silently and listened.

It was almost like a criminal getting her schemes unraveled by a detective.

The two of them had retreated into their own little world, so there was no space for me to butt in. All I could do is stand there like a scarecrow and watch what was happening.

Ria smiled triumphantly.

"You wanted to run from the beginning, didn't you?"

"Well... I had a feeling that Ria would ask to do something like this..."

Kirino finally admitted it, letting out a resigned sigh.

"So just in case, I put on clothes I would never think about wearing any other day... I guess it really did seem out of place."

Wait, no, I hadn't noticed anything at all.

"Also, Ria. Don't tell me that the reason you came to Japan was-"

"Of course! I came for revenge! Ehehe."

Ria gave Kirino an ear-to-ear grin. Kirino seemed a bit exasperated.

"That's what I was afraid of. Tch, ahh, I was an idiot for thinking that maybe you came because you wanted to see your dear dear older sister. You're the same heartless brat as always, aren't you?"

"No no no, I definitely wanted to see Kirino again too! For more than one reason."

In other words... she wanted to see the older sister who adored her.

And also the rival who had beaten her.

"Ria, I was just having a good day that day... although, I doubt telling you that will make you give up."

"Pffft. Don't make fun of me, please. Ria would never lose because of luck!"

Ria pouted a bit, but her words were filled with an amazing amount of confidence.

It was almost as if she was certain that if they raced a hundred times, she would beat Kirino a hundred times.

As they had this short conversation of theirs, a sense of tension began to prickle to life between Kirino and Ria. I could've sworn I saw sparks fly.

Ria was still full of smiles, but her smile no longer reached her eyes.

"That one time, Kirino was faster than Ria. Even though, up until that day, we weren't even in the same league. So I want to know. What happened over that one day? What trick did you use to make your legs so much faster? And even though you won against Ria, why did you go back?"

"Ria-"

"The things Kirino showed me today were the answers to that question, weren't they?"

"Yeah."

Kirino gave a quiet nod.

Her expression was a calm, gentle one, the complete opposite of the piercing stare Ria was shooting right at her.

"This is me. I finally understood that. The me who was overseas... that wasn't me. So I returned here. Returned to the place where the real me could live."

She wasn't talking directly at me, but nevertheless her words sent a warm wave of happiness through me.

... I see... you... you thought of this place like that.

"Ria might think that I'm making light of track or something... but I really can't throw away all the things I love. Track, my friends, my family, my hobbies... I need all of those things for me to be me."

That was something Kirino had discovered after she had come back, wasn't it?

She stressed and stressed and stressed over it... and in the end came to that conclusion. Nobody else had a right to argue.

My little sister suddenly put on an arrogant look that I honestly think suited her quite well. She puffed out her chest and made a declaration.

"So I'll stay the way I'm meant to be, but I'll still beat you all."

"If you say that, then Ria will race that Kirino, leave her in the dust, and go back to Los Angeles."

Ria slowly squatted down and grabbed something around her ankles.

"Ehehe. You know, coach told me to leave these on except when I take a bath, but..."

**Thud, thud.** It sounded like she had detached *something heavy* from her legs.

"Hold these for me, oniichan."

"Ah, uwah...."

She tossed to me a few weights she had tied around her ankles. These were those "power ankle" weights, weren't they?

Geez, they were heavy.

"... Is she some character in a battle manga or something...?"

I have to say, I was more shocked than impressed. And that retort was way more boring than what I usually could dish out.

Her coach and her... they were both seriously screwed in the head.

This wasn't training. This was some form of religious discipline or something.

"I'm ready. Alright... Kirino, let's make this a serious battle between two fellow runners!"

### Chapter 4: Part 11

On the school grounds at Kirino's junior high, a race was about to begin between two people.

The area was empty; we were the only three people around.

I was tasked with being the referee, and I stood at the finish line, watching the two of them as they took a crouching start.

Both Kirino and Ria were bent there with the exact same posture, and both waited for my signal.

It was a posture scientifically proven to provide the most power for a quick start.

A posture born of wisdom and diligent study, the result of many trial-and-error studies.

Indeed, they looked like catapults ready to spring.

"Let's do this..."

The atmosphere felt like it could light on fire with the slightest spark. Even though I was a hundred meters away, I could feel that all too clearly.

And then...

I shouted the go signal and vigorously brought my raised arm down.

**Thud!** I heard the sound of feet kicking off the ground. The two of them took a lightning-fast start and flew from the start line.

That had to be a hallucination... there was no way that could have been that loud... but I could definitely hear echoing thuds, almost as if the earth was shaking. That's how overwhelmingly fast Ria was accelerating.

Calling that a "rocket start" seriously wasn't doing it justice at all.

Anybody who's ever tried to run at full speed would probably understand how abnormal this was.



T-This girl... she was insanely fast from the first step she took!

Her first step, then her second, then her third and fourth... it took her just a few steps before she reached top speed.

Meanwhile, Kirino was just reaching the point where she was starting to accelerate.

They had only gone through a tenth of the hundred-meter race, but there was already a pretty big difference between them.

I don't think Ria herself had any intention to do this, but...

She was running as if to say "I'll make it clear how huge the difference is in our skill levels."

If I were in Kirino's shoes, seeing something like this would be enough to throw me into despair.

"..."

But the hope didn't die from Kirino's eyes. Her fighting spirit was still alive and strong.

Even as the gap between her and Ria widened more and more, she didn't falter and just continued accelerating. "I already know how good you are," she seemed to be saying. But all the same, she would try her very best and just do like she was taught in practice. That's what her eyes were saying right then.

My eyes were completely fixed on these two girls as they dashed down the track.

Their forms were completely identical.

I don't know what the technical term was for it. Their backs were straight, they swung their arms, and they were making huge strides forwards with their long legs.

For whatever strange reason, practiced, mastered movements like this seemed quite beautiful to me.

There was Ria, running up the track with a look of glee on her face.

And there was Kirino, who ran with a raging fire burning in her eyes as she glared at the back of her rival.

Their forms were identical, but they themselves were complete opposites. Such was the difference in their skill levels.

They had already sprinted more than fifty meters, and the gap between them was already quite large.

It would be impossible for Kirino to make a comeback victory now... even a newbie like me was pretty confident of that.

It really did seem like Ria was moments away from getting her revenge on Kirino.

“Go Kirino...”

That just naturally slipped out of my mouth.

“Go Kirino...!”

I began to cheer Kirino on from the finish line.

The feelings overflowing from my heart began to rise up within me, into my vocal cords.

“Go Kirino!!!”

This wasn't her problem alone.

Just like me a long time ago, Kirino was being backed into a corner by a little sister she couldn't measure up to.

But even though she was being backed into a corner, she didn't run like me, but just stood and faced the challenge.

I couldn't just stand here and not cheer her on.

“Kirino! Don't lose!!”

Because it wasn't just her there that was running... it was me as well.

It was the me from the past, who was completely beaten by his little sister in each and every little thing.

So I felt I was looking at a hypothetical me in a hypothetical world... a me who had faced my little sister straight and fought on without faltering.

"Go! You can still catch her! Don't give up!"

I could have sworn that Kirino then looked me right in the eyes.

I could have sworn that the gap between her and Ria was closing just a tiny, tiny bit.

No... it really was closing.

At her top speed... Kirino was faster than Ria!

"You can do it! Beat her... run right past her! Kirino!"

There were thirty meters left. I yelled out desperately.

Life is like an eroge with only one save file<sup>1</sup>.

Once you made a choice, there was no way to go back and change it.

If you failed, you couldn't undo that failure, and there were no miracles that would appear to help you out of trouble.

Impossible things were impossible... and hopeless things were definitely just hopeless.

But who the hell was the one who had decided that?! Impossible things... hopeless things... you really couldn't know until you tried! Only the gods themselves could know what would happen in the future!

So don't

---

<sup>1</sup> Or a box of chocolates, depending on who you ask.



“Beat her!!!”

There were going to reach the goal in only a few more moments.

Kirino was nipping at Ria’s heels, showing just how fast her top speed could be.

Ria probably didn’t find it too funny to hear me cheering only for Kirino.

Sorry Ria... you’re certainly a cute girl, and one who told me she “super loved” me.

But if I had to put this in words, this was habit. Yes, it was the natural habit of someone with a little sister.

It was obvious I had to cheer on and favor my own little sister. Yes, let me just make one thing clear...

“I’m not a lolicon! I’m a siscon!!! Beat her! Beat her, Kirinooooooooo~~!!!”

Honestly, I didn’t have a great idea of what I was shouting. What the hell was I saying right now?

But whatever. I put my heart and soul into it as I shouted at my little sister.

Boosted by my cheers, Kirino seemed to accelerate even further...

And then...

-

Kirino lost.

-

The fierce race had come to a close.

*Pant..... pant..... pant.....*

Having run with all her might and exhausted all her strength, Kirino stood next to me, her body half-bent and her shoulders rising up and down.

“Phew~!”

On the other hand, Ria seemed a bit out of breath, but didn’t appear to be too tired.

“.....”

This didn’t really feel like a situation where I could butt in.

Sure, you lost, but that was a pretty good race... even if I wanted with all my being to say that, I really couldn’t.

“Ahh..... so I lost.....”

Kirino looked up at the sky, sounding like something had just burst within her.

Ria walked up to her, and gave her the peace sign with a proud smile on her face.

“Kirino! Ehehe, Ria won!”

“... Ah, I know... you don’t have to keep saying it... I’m pretty frustrated here too, you know. Can’t you be a bit more considerate as the winner?”

“Nope! A win is a win! Hyaha~! Revenge success! Hehe, you got what you deserved!”

Ria bounced around, the joy of victory rushing through her every vein.

Ria was seriously merciless when she won... honestly, it was almost refreshing.

Although hearing all that coming from Ria seemed to make Kirino’s insides boil.

“This... little brat... so annoying... so so so so annoying! Ugh, you’re so annoying!”

Kirino stamped her feet and seemed genuinely frustrated. Tears even rose up in her eyes, and she began to mutter, clearly irritated.

“Ria... I love you, you know that? But right now you’re the most annoying person in the world.”

“Eh? Really? Hehehe, Ria also loves Kirino, but to be honest Ria came to Japan just to see Kirino look like that!”

Ria happily pointed at Kirino’s face, which made Kirino blow up.

“Ugyahhhh!! I got it now! I got it! Real little sisters are just terrible! Little sisters should stick to two dimensions!”

You’re the last person I want to hear that from.

Is what I said inside my head.

### Chapter 4: Part 12

The next day...

After she fulfilled her goal of “being able to behold Kirino’s crying face after exacting sweet, sweet revenge,” Ria suddenly declared that she was going back to America.

Ria’s stay was thus cut very short, and she had already finished her preparations for going back. I couldn’t help but just stand there and stare at her, exasperated.

“... Did you seriously come to Japan just for that...?”

“Eh? Ahahaha, oniichan is such an idiot...”

Hey, what the hell does that mean? I don’t want to be called an idiot by an idiot.

After checking her luggage in our living room, Ria came and plopped herself down next to me on the sofa. She brought her head up close to mine and waved her finger from side to side, a knowing look on her face.

“Were you really listening to Ria when she was talking? Sure, my top goal was to get revenge on Kirino. But that wasn’t all.”

“Ahh... you wanted to go sightseeing, and you wanted to see Kirino again, right? But, that’s...”

Those things shouldn’t have been very high on her priorities list, right?

So if she got her revenge, then there wasn’t any other reason for her to stay in Japan, right?

“No no no. Wrong wrong wroooooong~~.”

I must’ve said something funny, because Ria clutched her sides and began to laugh.

It might have been my imagination, but just for a second... I could have sworn Ria had a slightly lewd, adult look on her face.



"I always wanted to know why I lost that one time. So I came here to find out what gave Kirino that extra burst of speed back then. That was my true goal. I had already talked with a lot of people over in America and had the general idea... but you have to see things for yourself sometimes, right?"

"....."

"And then, and then, I figured it out. So now I'm leaving. If I don't go back right now and train, Kirino's going to catch up! There's not enough time to be standing still!"

I see.

*"I want to show Ria the things I like."*

*"I got it, Kirino."*

This must've been what Ria had understood when she was standing in the middle of Akihabara.

In other words... the one time that Kirino had beaten Ria was when I had gone to Los Angeles.

*"... After all, I have somewhere I need to be."* It must've been when she said that and left.

She was able to finally play eroge again and regain her strength... and then she went to challenge Ria to a race.

"Kirino was getting really worn out overseas without the things she loved. That girl you beat over and over again in Los Angeles wasn't the true Kirino. You were probably pretty surprised when she got back her strength."

"Huh? So you do understand."

"Don't take me for an idiot, you little brat. Who the hell do you think I am?"

"Kirino's super beloved oniichan?"

“H-How did it get to that?!”

“But but, Kirino was all worn out because her super beloved oniichan wasn’t there. And Kirino got really fast all of a sudden because her oniichan came to Los Angeles. Right?”

T-This girl... she was completely misunderstanding the situation...

Kirino hadn’t gotten worn out because she couldn’t see me...

It was because Ria was her roommate so she couldn’t play any eroge!

Also, she couldn’t see any of her dear friends, like Kuroneko or Ayase.

So, Kirino suddenly revived because I had let her play eroge!

I mean, as proof, she said it herself! *“It’s just that I’m getting to do something I love doing but haven’t been able to do for a long time... so of course I’m happy.” “You know, I somehow feel a lot better after playing eroge.”* She had said all that!

Honestly, thinking about this all with a clear head, that’s really a terrible reason to feel better!

Just imagine me having to tell an innocent kid like Ria “The reason you were beaten is because of eroge power!” That’s just ridiculous!

I-I guess there’s no choice... I’ll just leave Ria alone with her misunderstandings for now.

“Ria, it’s just like you say. Kirino regained her strength because she was able to meet her super beloved oniichan again.”

“Ohh, it was the power of love, wasn’t it?!”

“Uhh... yeah, that was it...”

Ugh, I feel gross. I seriously need a shower now.

“I thought so! So, if Ria also super loves her oniichan, will she also get super fast?”

“No! How did you get that?!”

I finally understand now! Her affection points for me had been maxed from the start because of that stupid logic, weren't they?!

Don't cling to me dammit! Do you have any idea how hot it is this month?!

“Kyouzuke-oniichan, I super love you! Mnnn, *kiss kiss*.”

*Bam!* The living room door opened.

“Y-You two again! How many times do I have to say the same thing?! You lolicon! You piece of trash!”

Gyah!

Kirino, why is it that you have the absolute worst timing in opening the door, each and every time?!

Dammit... I should just give up and become a lolicon.

### Chapter 4: Part 13

Soon, it was time for Ria to leave.

Both Kirino and I were in our entranceway, saying goodbye to the new little sister who had spent a number of days with us.

“See ya, Ria. I’ll be the one getting revenge next time, so be prepared.”

“I won’t let you~~! Ria will never lose to people who do track for weird reasons like you! Just keep chasing me and enjoy always looking at my back!”

“Hmph, you’ve got quite the mouth on you. Sure, I didn’t start running track because I purely and only love running like you, but don’t think I’m meek enough to just stand here and keep losing without a fight.”

“Can you do really anything about it? You already did what you first set out to do, didn’t you?”

“But track is already a big part of me. I definitely won’t throw it away, just like all the other things I love.”

“It kinda annoys me when you say that... makes it sound like you’re just running in your spare time or something... but that’s probably not it, right? Kirino can run that fast *because of that*, right?”

“Exactly. Also... you’ve given me a new reason to run too.”

Kirino puffed out her chest. There was no hint of hesitation in her confident eyes.

“Well, I guess all I can say is ‘catch me if you can.’ But I’ll never, ever lose to Kirino. I definitely, definitely won’t lose. When you’re putting all your effort into other things, don’t you ever forget that Ria will be running all the time, okay?”

“Perfect. You better say your prayers, because I’m coming for you.”<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> The literal idiom is “You better wash your neck and wait for me.” Implying that Kirino will be waiting to decapitate Ria. (Typesetter Note: ( ° д ° ))

“Ahah, okay.”

The two of them gripped each other’s hands in a firm handshake.

This was a conversation between only the two of them. Outsiders weren’t allowed in. There was a mutual understanding forming of them as fellow rivals.

“... I guess I should go soon.”

“Yeah. Bye bye, Ria.”

“Bye bye, Kirino.”

Ria gave us a last smile, tinged with sadness at having to part, and then she turned her back towards us.

“Hey.” As Ria put her hand on the doorknob, Kirino called out to her.

“Ria, I forgot to ask you one thing.”

“What?”

Ria turned only her head around to face us.

“When we raced in Los Angeles, were you wearing your ankle weights?”

“Of course not. They were off. It was a serious race, right?”

“I see. Thanks.”

Kirino quickly turned the other way.

Ria dashed outside and this time turned her entire body around towards us.

“Kyouzuke-oniichan! Bye byeeee~! The next time Ria comes to Japan, we’ll get married and I’ll take you back to Los Angeles, okay? It’s a promise!”

“We never made any promise like that! Get out, you damn brat!”

“Ehehe! You sure you won’t regret that? Next time we meet, I might’ve grown into a reaaaaaaaally nice woman!”

Leaving off with that sentence, Ria sped up and ran off somewhere.

It seemed like she was going to run all the way to the airport again...

Geez.

She came all the way from over the ocean, raised a huge ruckus here, and now she was going back across that ocean.

That girl was like a typhoon.

“... And off she goes.”

“Yeah.”

Kirino and I stood there looking off into the direction that Ria had gone.

“I think I’ll be just a little bit lonely without her here.”

“Lolicon.”

“I-I didn’t mean it like that!”

“Ah, right. You’re actually a siscon, was it?”

Kirino laughed mockingly. This girl... she was trying to make fun of me, wasn’t she?

Reining in her laugh, Kirino spoke again.

“Hey, I have a request for you.”

“Oh, is this another ‘life advice’ thing?”

God, I’m frustrated by how happy I accidentally sounded about that.

But Kirino shook her head.

“No, it’s not. I already told you the one you did before was the ‘last’ one, right?”

“I see... so it was...”

Certainly, the “final life advice session” my sister and I had was already over.

So Kirino wouldn’t come to me for “life advice” anymore.

But I mean, it’s not like it made much sense to talk about “life advice” and “requests” like this in terms of “first” and “last” anyways.

I guess this was just how Kirino saw things... so I really had no place to argue.

My God, this has been a weird story. When Kirino had come to me for our first life advice session, I’m pretty sure I found it kind of annoying and completely out of character for me. To think that at this point I could feel so... well, no, I still hate stuff like this.

“So, what is it? That ‘request’ of yours. I’m in a good mood today, so I’ll listen.”

But at this point, I’ve almost become resigned to the fact that she would come to me with stuff like this, and to the fact that I would listen.

I’m sure that even after this, my days with my completely uncute little sister would continue like this into eternity.

Although... I admit, a part of me didn’t think that was such a bad thing.

“Yeah, umm... it’s a bit hard to say.”

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“You, become my boyfriend.”

**END CHAPTER 4**

**END VOLUME 6**

**Afterword** (There are spoilers in this afterword, so beware if you haven't read the novel.)

This is Fushimi Tsukasa. Thank you very much for getting the sixth volume of Ore no Imouto ga Konna ni Kawaii Wake ga Nai. It's already the sixth volume. I'm thoroughly digesting the happiness of having come so far while I'm writing this afterword.

Well then, how was the first volume in the part of this series after Kirino's return to Japan?

When I was writing this volume, the rules were "If I can get the reader to laugh three times, it's a win. If I can get the reader to really burst out laughing just once, it's a huge victory." It would really make me happy if I managed to do that.

There was that scene in the novel where they ran up to the roof of the Radio Kaikan, but in reality that area is blocked off by caution tape. Also, please don't run inside the store so as to not cause trouble to the other customers.

Thanks to everyone who lent me these locations to use in the novel. Thanks also to everyone who gave me clues as to what would make an ideal otaku clubroom, and to my managing editor Kobara-sama who supplied me with useful information as a model builder, to Friend A who explained those big musical halls events to me, to all the seiyuu fans standing in front of the line at the Bizan Event... because of all of you, this volume was safely completed. Thank you again.

And now, to the people who sent me fan letters.

To S-ki-sama from Tokyo: I'm pretty surprised at how popular Kuroneko is.

To A-ya-sama: I'm really happy that Kyouusuke-oniichan and Manami are pretty popular with younger girls in elementary and junior high.

To Midori-sama from Gachapin: As always, thank you!

To I-bu-sama: That letter you sent me is a true treasure.

To I-saki-sama: Thanks for the cute New Year's card!



To H-kuchi-sama: Kyouusuke and the others all live in Chiba. I'll pass your letter to Kanzaki-san too.

To S-mizu-sama from Saitama: Your letter made me really happy. Akagi-oniichan will appear in the next volume too, I think.

To U-ya-sama from Fukuoka: I understand perfectly!

To Ko-sama from Kumamoto: School uniforms sure are cute. If you want, please recommend this book to your friends who like BL.

To H-wa-sama and S-ta-sama from Hokkaido: I was surprised at the longest letter I've ever gotten. And there were also illustrations...! But it doesn't fit into the letter case I'm using.

To Narise Yuki-sama: Thank you for the pretty illustrations. I made it my author's portrait for the sixth volume.

To S-Katsura-sama: I saw the impressions of the series you wrote on your blog. I was so happy that you read the book while imagining so many things.

To T-ta-sama from Kagawa: I completely looked over those self-made settings you made with all your heart. All the girls in your story are so tall! The shortest girl in the thirty you made was 171cm tall. Only a third of all girls are taller than that, so your setting might be a bit biased. Also, all those breasts and butts were too big, but depending on your concept there's a way to use that. But I did like it quite a lot.

To S-gen-sama from Miyagi: Likewise, thank you for the great letter. I was very moved by your words.

Everyone cheered me on so much. If you would like, please send me more letters.

I hope to make the next volume (I haven't written a word of it yet so this might change) a story centering around the theme of love. Please look forward to it.

- March 2010, Fushimi Tsukasa

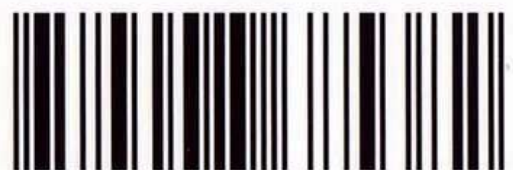
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